Story by Kyo Shirodaira Art by Eita Mizuno

14

Spiral

THE BONDS OF REASONING

Spiral THE BONDS OF REASONING 14

STORY/KYO SHIRODAIRA
ART/EITA MIZUNO

SPIRAL don't need

To find a way

You'll find

Your own way

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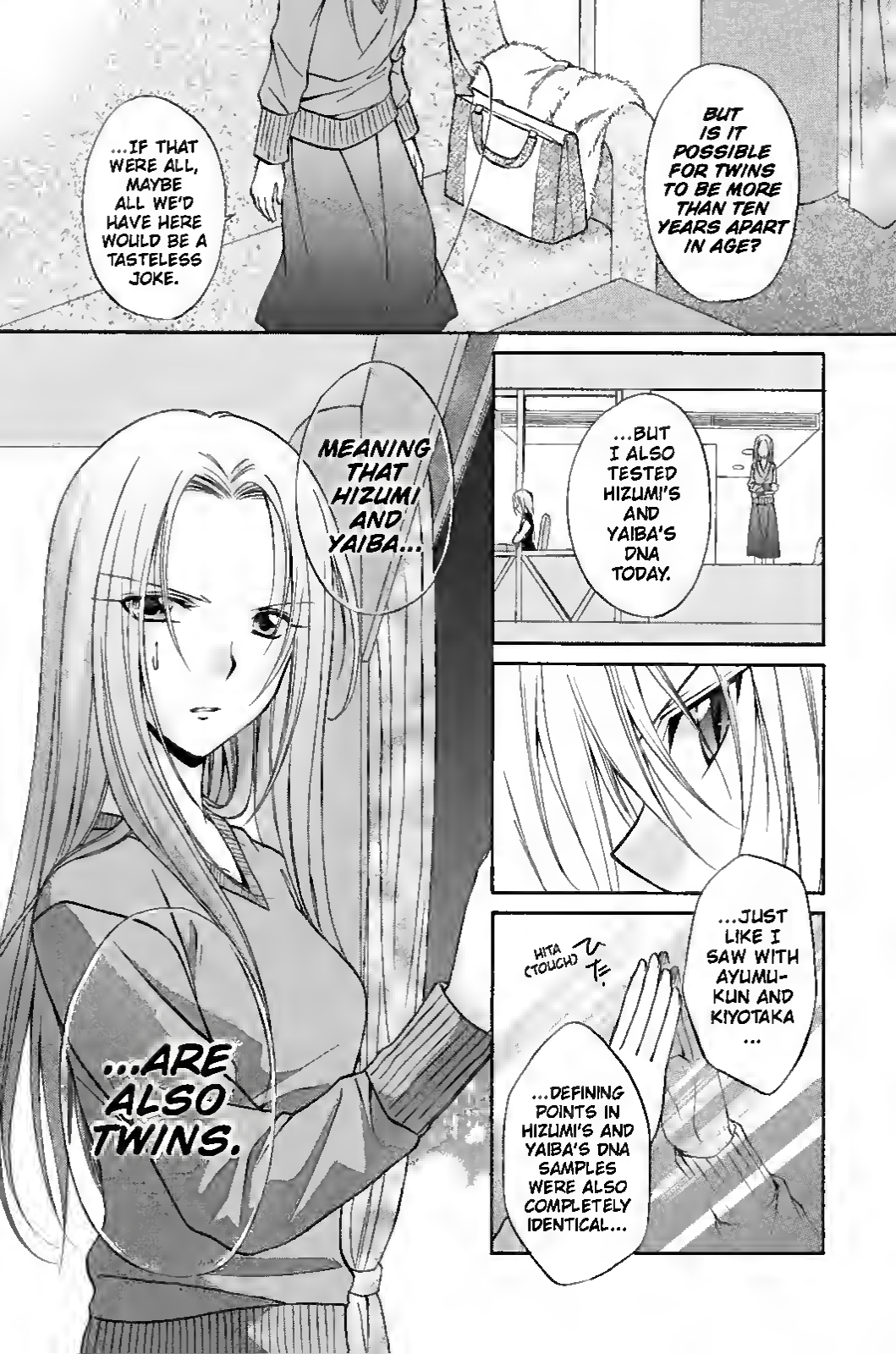
CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN
TWIN PARADOX

SPIRAL

...
YES.
YOU'RE SAYING AYUMU AND KIYOTAKA NARUMI'S DNA IS IDENTICAL?
OF COURSE, I DIDN'T COMPARE THE ENTIRE BASE SEQUENCE ...
...BUT BOTH THE ORIGINAL DATA WE HAD ON KIYOTAKA ...
...AND THE FRESH SAMPLE FROM AYUMU-KUN...
...WERE EXACTLY THE SAME ACROSS EACH OF THE TWENTY POLYMORPHIC REGIONS I EXAMINED.
WITH SO MANY MATCHING SEQUENCES, I CAN ONLY CONCLUDE I WAS LOOKING AT THE SAME PERSON'S DNA...
...OR A SET OF DNA FROM A PAIR OF IDENTICAL TWINS.

THE DNA DATA ON AYUMU-KUN THAT OUR ORGANIZATION HAD ON HAND...
...HAD BEEN ALTERED TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE HE WAS JUST A NORMAL SIBLING OF KIYOTAKA.
KACHI (FLICK)
KACHI
IT'S POSSIBLE THAT KIYOTAKA'S DATA WAS ALSO TAMPERED WITH, BUT...
GU (YANK)
HOW LOW IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY WOULD JUST HAPPEN TO MATCH UP?
YOU COULD VERY WELL SAY THEY'RE ZERO.
THE ODDS ARE LESS THAN ONE IN SEVERAL BILLION.
SO AYUMU NARUMI AND KIYOTAKA ARE TWINS ...?
.....
KOTO (CLACK)
...I CAN'T THINK OF ANY REASON WHY...
...IT WOULD BE MADE TO LOOK IDENTICAL TO AYUMU-KUN'S.


...IF THAT WERE ALL, MAYBE ALL WE'D HAVE HERE WOULD BE A TASTELESS JOKE.
BUT IS IT POSSIBLE FOR TWINS TO BE MORE THAN TEN YEARS APART IN AGE?
...BUT I ALSO TESTED HIZUMI'S AND YAIBA'S DNA TODAY.
MEANING THAT HIZUMI AND YAIBA...
...ARE ALSO TWINS.
...JUST LIKE I SAW WITH AYUMU-KUN AND KIYOTAKA ...
HITA (TOUCH)
...DEFINING POINTS IN HIZUMI'S AND YAIBA'S DNA SAMPLES WERE ALSO COMPLETELY IDENTICAL...

IS IT JUST ME, OR ARE OUR TWO MENUS...
...SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT?
...THEN...
YOU'RE IMAGINING THINGS.
ZU (SIP)
THIS ISN'T THE ONE YOU TOLD ME JUST YESTERDAY WAS ALMOST PAST ITS EXPIRATION, IS IT!?
...EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT THIS CHILLED TOFU IS ALL ABOUT!
AND IN THIS SEASON, NO LESS!

OF ALL THE...!
GUSARI (STAB)
PIKI (SNAP)
I'LL PASS.
DON'T WORRY. ONE DAY OVER'S NOT GOING TO BE A PROBLEM.
THEN WHY DON'T YOU EAT IT, NARUMI-SAN!?
AFTER I WENT OUT OF MY WAY TO COME BY AND CHEER YOU UP
THIS TREATMENT IS SOMETHING ELSE!
AND YET SHE GOES AND EATS IT.
I DON'T NEED YOU WORRYING ABOUT ME.
I'M JUST AS FINE AS EVER.
THAT'S EXACTLY IT!
THAT IN ITSELF IS BIZARRE, CONSIDERING THE SITUATION YOU'RE IN!

...I GUESS...
...IT IS PRETTY BIZARRE.
GYO (SHOCK)
EITHER WAY, EAT YOUR FOOD.
IF WE DON'T EAT OUR FILL...
...WE WON'T BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND THE WORST WHEN IT COMES.
...SO YOU'RE SAYING HIZUMI AND YAIBA ARE ALSO TWINS?

NOW, THAT I FIND HARD TO BELIEVE.
AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, HIZUMI'S DNA DATA THAT OUR ORGANIZATION HAD ON FILE HAS BEEN TAMPERED WITH...
...TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE HE WAS JUST YAIBA'S BROTHER.
BUT IT'S THE SAME THING WITH THEM!
BUT MY TEST RESULTS SHOW THEIR SAMPLES ARE EXACTLY THE SAME.
...BUT THERE'S THE CHANCE THAT YAIBA'S DATA WAS ALSO ALTERED—
WAIT.
I HAVE MORE EVIDENCE THAT HIZUMI AND YAIBA ARE TWINS.
GOSO (RUMMAGE)

SU (LIFT)
STARTING WITH YOU, RUTH-KUN, I GOT BRAND-NEW SAMPLES FROM FIVE OTHER BLADE CHILDREN.
AND ALL OF YOUR DNA TESTS...
TON (THUD)
...SHOWED A PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND HIZUMI.
BUT HIZUMI'S YOUNGER THAN ALL OF YOU.
GU (SQUEEZE)
SO THERE'S NO WAY HE COULD BE THE FATHER OF THE BLADE CHILDREN, RIGHT?
THESE RESULTS COULD ONLY BE POSSIBLE...
...IF HIZUMI AND YAIBA HAVE THE SAME DNA.

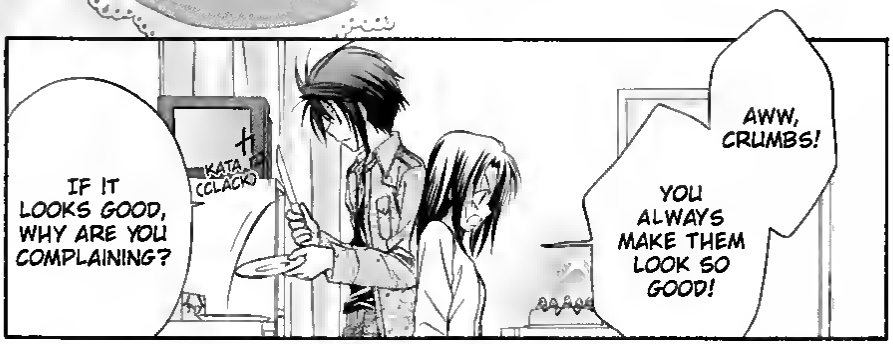
IN OTHER WORDS, ONLY IF THEY ARE IDENTICAL TWINS.
...I'M EVEN MORE CONVINCED OF THE LIKELIHOOD THAT AYUMU-KUN AND KIYOTAKA ARE ALSO TWINS.
THAT'S WHY...
BASA (FWAP)
WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON HERE...?
IF ONE SET IS TWINS, THEN THE OTHER SET MUST BE ALSO.
THE ABSOLUTE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN GOD AND THE DEVIL.
PAN (SLAP)
THERE'S MORE THAN A TWENTY-YEAR AGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIZUMI AND YAIBA.

...THE TRUTH THAT DROVE KANON TO CHOOSE DEATH?
...IS THIS ...
CAN THEY STILL BE TWINS, THEN...?
...NO.
IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THIS IS THE ONLY THING.
HOW DOES THIS CHANGE THE LAYOUT OF THE CHESS-BOARD...?
COULD WHAT LIES HEREIN...
...BE THE PIECE THAT WILL ULTIMATELY ERADICATE THE TWO GODS, AYUMU AND KIYOTAKA NARUMI?

THOUGH IT'S THE ONE THING I FIND HARDEST OF ALL TO BELIEVE.
BUT HAVING COME THIS FAR, I HAVE TO CONSIDER IT.
IF SO, THEN ...
...I HAVE A HYPOTHESIS.
TOMORROW I'M GOING TO PAY AYUMU-KUN'S PARENTS A VISIT.
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO LEARN SOMETHING FROM THEM.
AYUMU NARUMI'S ...
...IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, FOR SOME TIME NOW, HIS MOTHER'S BEEN...

THAT'S RIGHT...
HIS MOTHER'S BEEN IN A LONG-TERM CARE INSTITUTION FOR OVER FIVE YEARS NOW.
AND AYUMU'S FATHER ATTENDS TO HIS WIFE FULL-TIME.
DON'T YOU...
...HAVE SCHOOL TODAY?
SU (CLIFT)
I TOOK THE DAY OFF.

I SORTA GOT THE VIBE THAT THIS WAS NO TIME TO BE IN CLASS.
.....
...WELL, YOU'RE FREE TO DO THAT, I GUESS...
WHOA!
PEKAAA (SHIIINE)
YOU REALLY OUTDID YOURSELF WITH TODAY'S SWEETS TOO!


AWW, CRUMBS!
YOU ALWAYS MAKE THEM LOOK SO GOOD!
KATA (CLACK)
IF IT LOOKS GOOD, WHY ARE YOU COMPLAINING?

I HAVEN'T EXERCISED AT ALL SINCE BEING ADMITTED!
SAKU (SLICE)
I FINALLY STARTED REHABILITATION, BUT IT'S ALREADY TAKEN ITS TOLL ON MY WEIGHT!
AND IF I KEEP EATING LIKE THIS...!
SU (SLIDE)
UGH...

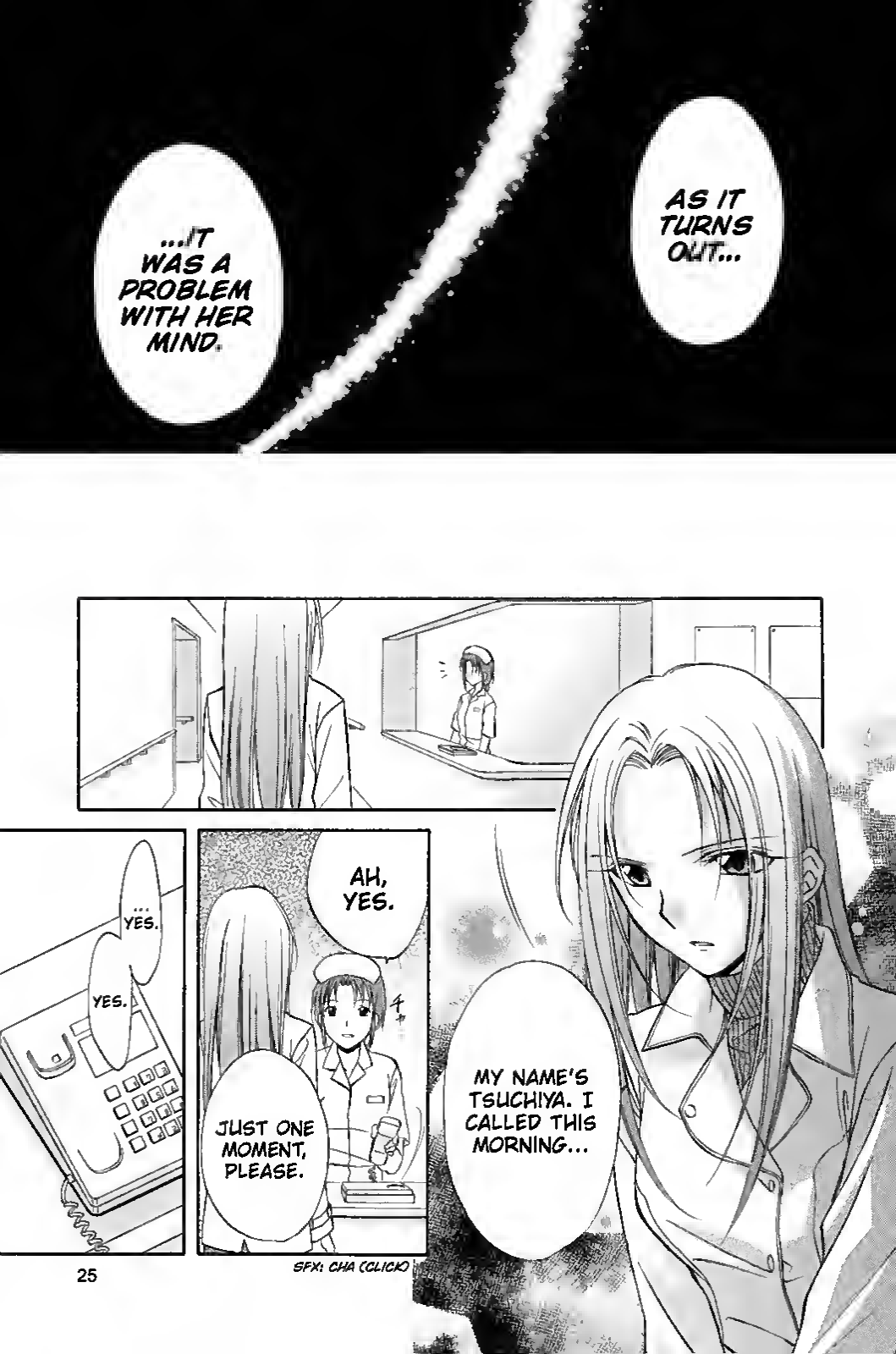
I DON'T THINK TWO OR THREE KILOGRAMS MORE IS GOING TO MAKE THAT BIG A DIFFERENCE.
PIKI!! (SNAP)
DON'T SAY IT LIKE IT'S TOO LATE FOR ME!!
BOFU (POOMF)
KACHA (CLINK)
AHHH...
I'LL GO ON A DIET THE MINUTE I'M DISCHARGED.
GAA (WHIRR)

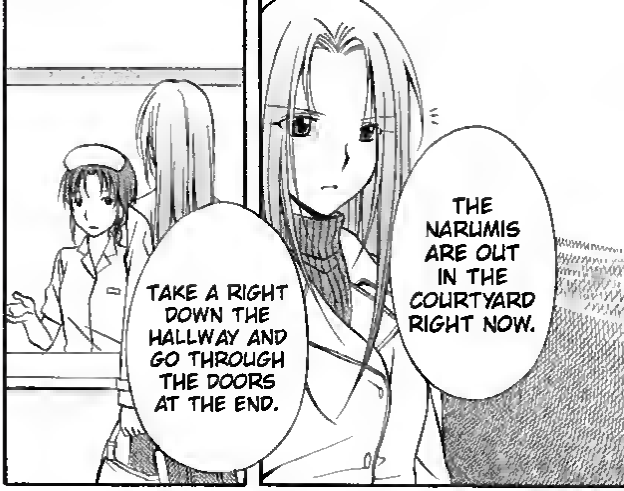
PLEASE COOK ME SOME TASTY DIET DISHES WHEN I GET OUT.
I WONDER ...
I FEEL LIKE THINGS WILL FINALLY BE SETTLED BY THEN.
WHAT ARE YOU IMPLYING?
I MEAN, WHEN THIS IS ALL OVER AND MY BROTHER COMES BACK...
...THERE WON'T BE ANY NEED FOR ME TO GO ON LIVING WITH YOU, SIS.

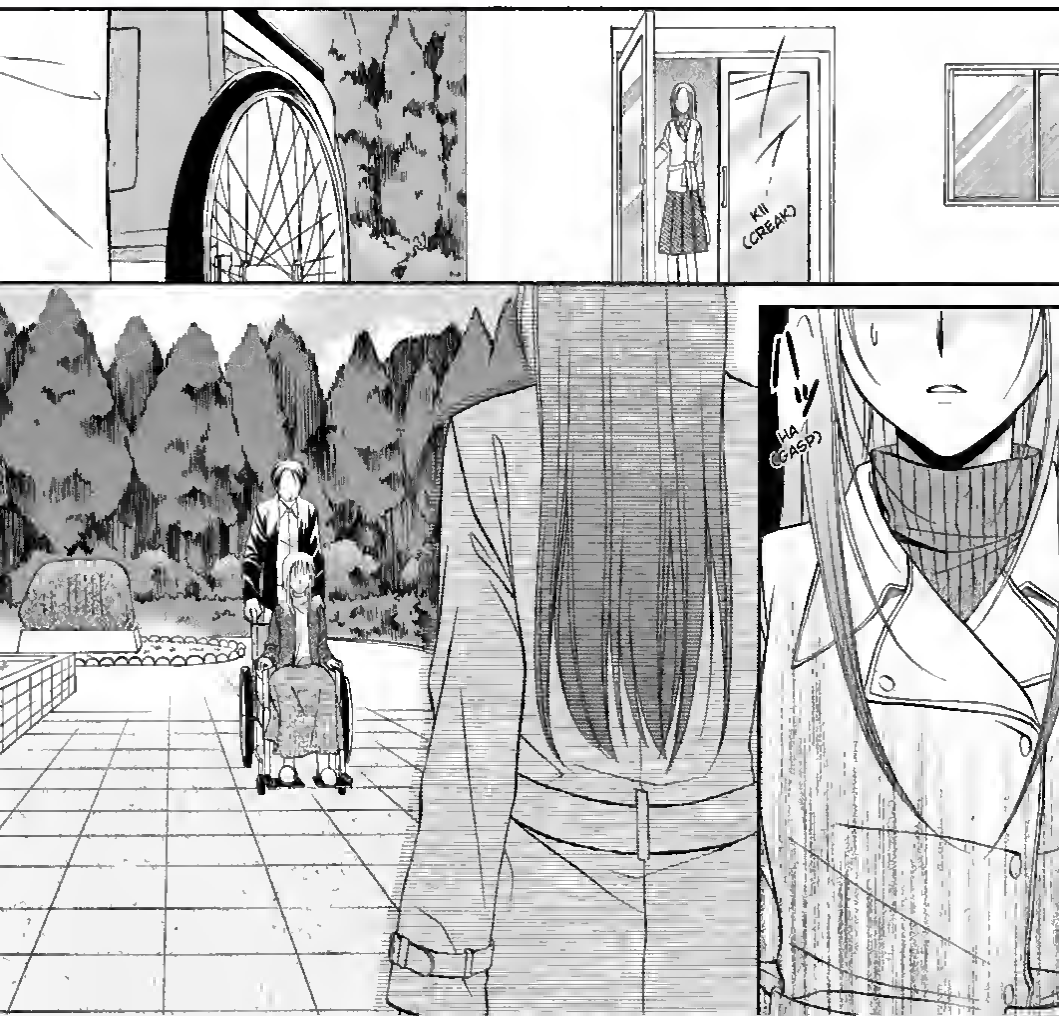
...EVEN IF YOU DO LIVE WITH YOUR PARENTS ...
...IS THERE ANY PLACE FOR YOU THERE?
... BESIDES ...
...YOU WOULD GO BACK TO THE NARUMI HOUSE-HOLD?
カチン
SFX: KACHIN (CLINK)
WHY WOULD YOU...?
WHEN THIS IS ALL DONE...
...WHY SHOULD YOU TRY TO BE NICE TO THEM?

TO BE HONEST...
...I DON'T KNOW YOUR PARENTS VERY WELL.
I ONLY MET THEM ONCE TO INTRODUCE MYSELF BEFORE WE GOT MARRIED.
AND WE DIDN'T REALLY HAVE TIME FOR A PROPER CONVERSATION.
KIYOTAKA-SAN SAID THEY WERE JUST NEVER THE AFFECTIONATE TYPE.
BUT THEY PRACTICALLY NEVER CALLED EACH OTHER AFTER THAT.
EVEN AFTER YOU CAME TO LIVE WITH US, THEY NEVER EVEN CALLED TO CHECK ON YOU, RIGHT?

NEITHER YOU NOR KIYOTAKA-SAN TALK ABOUT YOUR PARENTS...
IS IT BECAUSE THERE'S BEEN SOME KIND OF FALLING OUT?
LIKE MY BROTHER SAID, IT'S JUST A SIMPLE CASE OF APATHY.
THERE ARE PARENTS WHO HAVE A CASUAL APPROACH TO THEIR DUTY LIKE THAT.
...IS YOUR MOM STILL IN THE HOME?
ACTUALLY, I...
....NEVER HEARD WHAT YOUR MOTHER WAS SICK WITH...
.....
...IT'S NOT SO MUCH HER HEALTH THAT'S THE PROBLEM.


AS IT TURNS OUT...
...IT WAS A PROBLEM WITH HER MIND.
MY NAME'S TSUCHIYA. I CALLED THIS MORNING...
AH, YES.
JUST ONE MOMENT, PLEASE.
SFX: CHA (CLICK)
...
YES.
YES.


THE NARUMIS ARE OUT IN THE COURTYARD RIGHT NOW.
TAKE A RIGHT DOWN THE HALLWAY AND GO THROUGH THE DOORS AT THE END.


KII (CREAK)
(HA (GASP)

...KIYOTAKA AND AYUMU-KUN'S PARENTS...
THEY ARE...
...AND PEOPLE HAD HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR HER FUTURE.
SHE WAS RECOGNIZED FOR HER SKILL...
WHEN MY MOM WAS YOUNG, SHE ASPIRED TO BE A PIANIST.
SO SHE GOT MARRIED AND LIVED HER DREAM THROUGH HER CHILD.
...AND HAD TO GIVE UP HER DREAM.
BUT SHE INJURED HER HANDS IN AN ACCIDENT ...

IN OTHER WORDS, MY BROTHER.
MY BROTHER WAS GIFTED IN WAYS THAT WERE BEYOND MY MOM'S WILDEST DREAMS.
HE WAS AT THE TOP OF THE GLOBAL SCENE IN HIS TEENS...
...AND BECAME A PIANIST THAT PEOPLE CALLED A LIVING LEGEND.
APPARENTLY MY MOM COULDN'T HAVE BEEN HAPPIER.
IT SEEMED SHE'D GET TO SEE HER LIFE'S ASPIRATIONS FULFILLED THROUGH MY BROTHER.
BUT BEFORE MY BROTHER TURNED TWENTY ...
...AT THE END OF A RECITAL IN GERMANY...
... BEFORE MY MOM AND HIS AUDIENCE ...
THIS DOESN'T SEEM TO BE WHERE I BELONG.
...HE SAID WITH A SMILE, AND THEN...

AND JUST LIKE THAT, HE RETIRED FROM THE MUSIC WORLD.
TON (CHOP)
...HE SLAMMED DOWN THE KEYBOARD FALL ONTO HIS RIGHT HAND.
...JUST LIKE THIS...
HE SMASHED AND BROKE ALL FIVE FINGERS IN ONE GO.
MY MOM WAS ALWAYS STUCK ON MY BROTHER AND BARELY EVEN ACKNOWL-EDGED ME.
SHE WAS LIKE THAT EVEN AFTER HE RETIRED, SO THERE'S NO REASON FOR HER TO SEE ME NOW.
I DOUBT SHE EVEN REMEMBERS SHE HAS A SECOND SON.
AFTER THAT, MY MOM'S HEALTH TOOK A TURN FOR THE WORSE...
EVEN-TUALLY, SHE WENT TO LIVE IN THE HOME.
THE DOCTORS SAID IT WAS THE SYMPTOMS FROM A MENTAL SHOCK...
...AND SHE WAS IN AND OUT OF HOSPITALS WITH NO CURE IN SIGHT.

IT'S ONLY NATURAL FOR US TO GROW APATHETIC OF ONE ANOTHER, DON'T YOU THINK?
AS ANYONE WOULD EXPECT, MY BROTHER LOST TOUCH WITH MY PARENTS AFTER THAT.
KACHIN (CLINK)
MY DAD WAS ALWAYS PREOCCUPIED WITH LOOKING AFTER MY MOM AND...
...NEVER CARED A LICK FOR ME.
...FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SPEAK WITH ME.
...THANK YOU VERY MUCH...
KURURI (TURN)
NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME.

TA (DASH)
.....
KA (CLACK)
KO
KO (CLICK)
KO
GEHO (COUGH)
GEHO
GEHO
THIS IS THE TRUTH.
THIS IS IT...
THIS IS IT...!!

THEY DON'T RESPECT HUMAN LIFE AT ALL...!!
THESE PEOPLE...
...THEY'RE MAD...

W-
WOW, THAT'S A PRETTY GLOOMY ENVIRON-MENT YOU GREW UP IN.
OH?
IF YOU JUST THINK OF IT AS A KIND OF HANDS-OFF POLICY, IT'S NOT THAT SPECIAL.
.....

PON (PAT)
PON
AYUMU.
SIT HERE A MINUTE.
AND TURN YOUR BACK TOWARD ME.
.....?
NIKORI (SMILE)
GI (CREAK)
FUWA (FLOAT)

...EVEN I...
...CAN GET FUNNY IDEAS, YOU KNOW?
IF YOU HAD THE GUTS TO ACT ON THEM...
...YOU'D HAVE ALREADY TRIED SOMETHING ON ME LONG AGO.

...YOU DESERVE TO FEEL ANOTHER'S WARMTH MORE OFTEN.
HRM.
SO THAT YOU CAN FEEL...
...THAT THERE'S A PLACE FOR YOU IN THIS WORLD.

BUT EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE AFFECTIONATE TOWARD ME NOW...
...I STILL COME AFTER MY BROTHER.
HOW'D YOU GET ALONG SO WELL WITH KIYOTAKA-SAN WITH THAT KIND OF ATTITUDE?
I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE A STIFF AND UNEASY RELATIONSHIP.
.....
...WELL, I CAN'T DENY...
...THAT MY BROTHER WAS MY IDEAL.
HE WAS SELFISH AND ALWAYS CAUSING TROUBLE, ROBBING ME OF ALL SORTS OF CHANCES, BUT...
...I COULD ONLY THINK THAT HE HAD THE RIGHT TO DO THOSE THINGS.
HE'S SO BRILLIANT— I'M HELPLESS BEFORE HIM.
I COULDN'T RESENT...
...OR HATE HIM FOR IT.

WHAT I HATED MOST OF ALL...
...WAS MYSELF FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO BE LIKE HIM.
I COVETED IT...
...THAT ULTIMATE HAPPI-NESS.
MY WHOLE LIFE...
...I WANTED TO BE LIKE MY BROTHER.
...BUT...
GU (SQUEEZE)
...SIS...

...REALLY GOING TO MAKE ME HAPPY?

I WAS TOLD TO GIVE YOU THIS ON YOUR WAY OUT.
IT WAS FROM SOMEONE NAMED "KIYOTAKA NARUMI".
THE SON OF THE COUPLE YOU JUST CAME TO VISIT.
...THE RESEARCH REPORT HIZUMI WROTE UP IN COLLEGE!?
...COULD THIS BE...
BA (SNATCH)

HOTEL
VUUUN (BZZZ)
VUUUN
Ruth-kun!
Can you hear me!?
CHA (CLICK)
VUUUN
VUUUN

What's up?
GO GUARD AYUMU-KUN, RIGHT NOW!
JUST DON'T LET HIM COME IN CONTACT WITH HIZUMI!!
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?
I don't have time to explain the specifics to you!
IF AYUMU-KUN LEARNS THE TRUTH FROM HIZUMI NOW...
出発ロビー
Departure Lobby
Restaurant
...IT COULD ALL BE OVER!

Spiral
THE BONDS OF REASONING

SPIRAL

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL
BURORORORO (VROOOOM)
KI (SQUEAL)
TON (TMP)

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

WHAT'S UP, RUTHERFORD?
.....
YOU LOOK ODDLY SERIOUS.
I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
IS THAT SO WRONG?
.....
...NO, I GUESS NOT.
SU (TURN)
EITHER WAY, LET'S NOT STAND AROUND IN THE STREET.
WANNA COME OVER?

SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT HIM...
AYUMU ...
IT'S LIKE HE WAS FORCING HIMSELF TO COME OFF AS CALM!...
BUT, SIS...
...IS BECOMING LIKE MY BROTHER...
...REALLY GOING TO MAKE ME HAPPY?

KNOWING WHAT I KNOW NOW...
...MY GOD-LIKE BROTHER HAS A FATE TO SHOULDER TOO.
AND NOW I THINK HE PROBABLY HAS A LOT TOUGHER THINGS TO DEAL WITH THAN YOU'D EXPECT.
...I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE, BUT...
...THE IDEAL THAT I WANTED SO BADLY...
...MIGHT ACTUALLY BE SOMETHING MISERABLY DIFFICULT.
...HMM.
WELL...
...DOING WHAT-EVER HE WANTS ...
...AND THEN COMPLAINING, "OH, I'M SO MISERABLE" ...
...SOUNDS PRETTY DISGUSTING TO ME...

HE'S STRONGER THAN ANYBODY...
HIGH ABOVE EVERYONE ELSE...
HE DOESN'T HAVE ANYONE...
...WHO UNDERSTANDS THE WORLD THE SAME WAY HE SEES IT.
ANY JOY...
...OR SUFFERING HE MIGHT EXPERIENCE...
...IS UNIMAGINABLE TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.
SO I THINK HE'S FOREVER TORMENTED BY HIS EMPTY, HOPELESS LONELINESS.
AND THAT'S ...
...A VERY MISERABLE EXISTENCE TO HAVE.

...WAS SURPRISINGLY, HIS COUNTERPART. HE ALONE—YAIBA MIZUSHIRO.
...THE ONLY PERSON WHO COULD HAVE SEEN THE WORLD THE SAME WAY HE DOES...
...AND GENUINELY UNDERSTOOD HIS SUFFERING AND JOY...
HEH...
THAT'S WHY HE PURPOSELY ESTABLISHED AN ORGANIZATION THAT WAS PITTED AGAINST HIM.
LIKE HE WAS TRYING TO COVER UP HIS LONELINESS, YOU KNOW?
THEN YAIBA MIZUSHIRO WAS ALSO ALL ALONE...
...IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
DOESN'T THAT MAKE SENSE?
...
YOU'RE RIGHT.
.....

WHETHER THEY'RE ENEMIES OR FRIENDS ...
...IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANYBODY TO UNDERSTAND YOUR WORLD WITH YOU...
...THEN THERE PROBABLY ISN'T MUCH CHANCE FOR HAPPINESS.
...HUH?
DIDN'T HIZUMI-KUN SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT NOT TOO LONG AGO?
HEH...
TON (PAT)
IT FEELS GOOD, BUT...
...THIS BODY WARMTH IS MEANT FOR MY BROTHER.

I FEEL LIKE THINGS ARE GOING TO WORK OUT.
THANKS TO YOU, I FEEL MY PRIORITIES HAVE BEEN STRAIGHTENED OUT.
THANKS ...
...SIS.
スッ
SUKKU (ST. NO)
THINGS ...
...ARE GOING TO WORK OUT?
LIKE I'LL MANAGE TO KEEP FIGHTING TO THE VERY END.
.....
HE ALWAYS DID COME OFF LIKE HE WAS STRAINING HIMSELF BUT...

BAN (BAM)
BATA (STOMP)
BATA
BATA
IT FEELS LIKE TODAY WAS MORE SO THAN USUAL...
EXCUSE ME!
MS. SISTER!
HAS NARUMI-SAN BEEN HERE!?
WH...
WHAT ON EARTH IS THE MATTER?
NARUMI-SAN WASN'T IN SCHOOL!
NOR AT HOME.
HUFF..
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AYUMU, HE WAS JUST HERE.
HUFF...
IS IT THAT BIG A DEAL IF HE SKIPS SCHOOL?

THIS IS AN EMER-GENCY!
KANON-SAN WAS KILLED BY HIZUMI-SAN TWO DAYS AGO ...
THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NOW!

CHI (TICK)
CHI
CHI
HAVE YOU EATEN YET?
IF NOT, I'LL MAKE SOMETHING.

...I'M NOT IN THE EATING MOOD.
DON'T SAY THAT LIKE IT'S SUCH A BAD THING.
...YOU WANT ME TO EAT YOUR COOKING ...?
GATA (CLATTER)
I DON'T NEED YOU LOOKING AFTER ME.

...
COULDN'T STOP HIZUMI.
TOPO (GLUB)
...I...
YOU COULD ACCUSE ME OF KILLING KANON HILBERT.
I WOULDN'T DENY IT...
KOTO (CLUNK)
KANON CHOSE DEATH FOR HIMSELF.
.....

...WHAT MADE KANON CHOOSE DEATH... HM?
...SO THE PROBLEM IS...
YOU DIDN'T KILL HIM.
AND IN A SENSE, NEITHER DID HIZUMI.
KOTO (CLINK)
...HOW DO YOU SEE IT?

...A WAY TO ERADICATE BOTH GODS FROM THE BOARD IN THE END?
DO YOU SEE...
...GOOD QUESTION.
SORTING THROUGH EVERYTHING I KNOW NOW...
...AND KNOWING WHAT'S HAPPENED ...
...I CAN PRETTY MUCH FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.
BUT...
...EVEN KNOWING THAT...
...DOESN'T MEAN I CAN CHANGE IT. IT'S TOO STRONG A CURRENT.

JUST BECAUSE I KNOW THAT SUMMER COMES AFTER SPRING...
...FOLLOWED BY FALL...
...AND THEN WINTER...
...DOESN'T MEAN I CAN NECESSARILY CHANGE THAT ORDER.
...IN OTHER WORDS ...
...WE CAN'T BE SAVED.
...IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY?
WE'RE MERELY PAWNS IN THIS RIDICULOUS STORY SPUN BY SOME CRACKPOT CREATORS.
THERE ARE SOME WHO BELIEVE IN THOSE CREATORS AND ARE TRYING TO MAKE THEIR STORY A REALITY.
THIS WHOLE THING'S BEEN SET IN MOTION WITH A DRIVE AS STRONG AS THE TURNING OF THE SEASONS.
WITH MY LIMITED STRENGTH, IT'D BE A FUTILE EFFORT TO TRY TO RESIST AND TURN IT ALL AROUND.

NO MATTER WHAT CATASTROPHE OF A FIGHT AWAITS ME.
BUT I SWEAR ...
...I'LL SHOW THEM ALL I CAN CLING TO HOPE.
...SO...
...JUST WHAT...
...DO YOU...
...REALLY—

GIKU (SHOCK)
...WE'RE AS IDENTICAL AS TWINS?
...DID MY AND MY BROTHER'S DNA SHOW...
.....!
REALITY DOESN'T DO THINGS HALF-ASSED.
...I SWEAR.
KOTO (CLACK)
BRRRING
BRRRING
GU (CLENCH)

GACHA CHA
HELLO.
NARUMI RESIDENCE.
BRRRING
BRRRING
BRRRING
Hey.
HOW'VE YOU BEEN?

I'M TELLIN' YOU, I DIDN'T LOSE NOTHIN'.
ALL I DID WAS BRING HIM FLOWERS.
Fine, we'll leave it at that.
!
AREN'T YOU DOWN AFTER LOSING TO KANON HILBERT?
GASA CLATTER
I SHOULD BE ASKING YOU THAT.
So, where should we meet?
HMM...
AS FOR THAT...
Kirie-chan sure seems to be in a rush.
...and I wanna settle this before she gets in our way.
I AGREE.
BY THE BY...
...AYUMU...
...COULD YOU MEET ME SOON?

GOT IT.
I THINK I CAN GET THERE IN AN HOUR.
DON'T BE MAD IF I'M A LITTLE LATE.

HEY.
CAN'T YOU SEE ME OFF IN A NICER WAY?
THERE ARE TOO MANY THINGS WE STILL DON'T KNOW.
WAIT UNTIL KIRIE TSUCHIYA GETS BACK.
THIS IS NO TIME TO BE RUNNING DANGEROUS RISKS.
SU (RAISE)
I DON'T LIKE VIOLENCE.
PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME RESORT TO IT.
WE'LL BE RUNNING DANGEROUS RISKS NO MATTER WHAT WE DO.

STOP.
IF YOU'RE GOING TO USE FORCE...
...THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN WIN AGAINST A VETERAN LIKE ME—
DAN (BEAM)

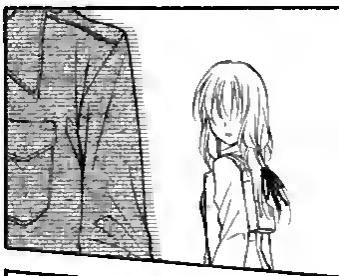
HYU
CWHOOSH
WHA ...!?
BOSH CWHUMP
... SORRY.
I CAN'T RUN AWAY OR STAND IDLY BY...
...ANY LONGER.

HUFF
HUFF
!
NARUMI-SAN!
ZEI
ZEI
HOW DARE YOU SKIP SCHOOL WITHOUT MY PERMISSION!
ZEI (WHEEZE)
AH.
SORRY FOR WORRYING YOU.
I JUST DIDN'T FEEL UP FOR IT.
YOU DIDN'T FEEL UP FOR IT...?
ARGH, THAT DOES IT!
EITHER WAY!

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
RUTHER-FORD JUST STOPPED BY...
...AND NOW HE'S SAYING HE HAS TO HAVE HIS VANILLA ICE CREAM.
WH—
ARE YOU HIS LACKEY, NARUMI-SAN!?
HE CAN BE SCARY WHEN HE'S MAD.
LISTEN.
I'LL BUY THE ICE CREAM AND THEN COME RIGHT BACK.
SFX: GOSO (RUMMAGE)
CHARI (JINGLE)
WAIT AT MY PLACE FOR ME.
UM...
BFF!

WOW.
EVEN YOU CAN BE PRETTY WARM.
H-
HUH!?
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN!!?
NOTHING IN PARTICULAR.
PA (PART)
TA (TMP)

...NARUMI-SAN...?



AYUMU...!
.....
DO YOU STILL...
...SEE MORE HOPE IN THIS WORLD THAN NOT...?

SPIRAL

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE
TWO SKIES

.....
WHAT A MESS...
I NEVER THOUGHT HE'D HAVE THESE THINGS ON HAND...
JARA (JINGLE)
ジャラ!
DID HE SEE THIS SITUATION COMING?

WHATEVER HE IS CAPABLE OF DOING FROM THIS POINT ON...
...MIGHT NOT BE SO DIFFERENT FROM US BLADE CHILDREN...
AYUMU NARUMI SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO POINT A GUN AT SOMEBODY SO EASILY.
...THIS IS BAD.
!
KII (CREAK)
GACHA (KLATCH)
PATA (TMP)
PATA

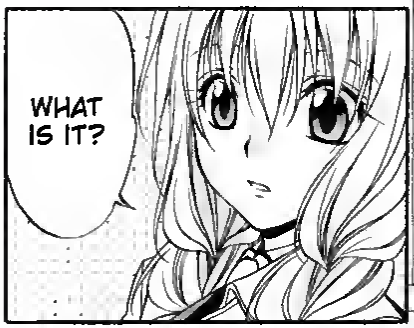
.....
UH...
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE...?
HE SAID HE WAS GOING OUT TO BUY SOME VANILLA ICE CREAM.
...WHAT AN IDIOT.
WHERE'S AYUMU NARUMI!?
UH.
HE ACTUALLY TOOK OFF BECAUSE HIZUMI SUMMONED HIM.
...SO THAT'S ...
...A REALLY BAD DEVELOP-MENT, RIGHT?
WORSE THAN YOU CAN EVEN IMAGINE.

WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME.
AH! SURE!
YOU'RE RIGHT!
JARA (RATTLE)
WOULD YOU LET ME LOOSE?
DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE PUT THE KEY?
HE DID THIS TO ME WHILE I WAS UNCONSCIOUS.
NO IDEA.
BUCHI (SNAP)
FASA (FLIP)
...SHEESH!
PLEASE DON'T ASK A GIRL TO DO SOMETHING SO UNCIVILIZED.
THERE SHOULD BE A SUITABLE TOOL AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.
IT'S FINE, JUST CUT THE CHAIN FOR ME.

.....
PIN (PING)
NIKO (BEAM)
THERE, THEY'RE OFF.

SU (LIFT)
I GUESS I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE...

...I'LL GIVE YOU ONE WORD OF ADVICE.


WHAT IS IT?

GOOD THING THEY WERE SUCH CHEAP HANDCUFFS.
KOTO (CLUNK)
HIGH-QUALITY ONES TAKE MORE TIME.

WHA ...!?
IS THAT ANYTHING TO SAY AFTER I JUST SAVED YOU!?
COMPARED TO THAT, THE UNCIVILIZED WAY IS FAR MORE ENDEARING.
PETA (TMP)
IF YOU'RE GOING TO CALL YOURSELF A GIRL, THEN DON'T SHOW THAT YOU CAN PULL OFF A TRICK LIKE THAT AS IF IT'S NOTHING.
I SWEAR, THAT PART OF HIM IS SO LIKE NARUMI-SAN...
GACHA (CKLATCH)
I DON'T KNOW.
SO WHERE WAS NARUMI-SAN CALLED OUT TO?
A WELL-KNOWN PLACE THAT'S ONE HOUR FROM HERE...?
...THEN IT'S UNDOUBTEDLY SOMEWHERE HE ALREADY KNOWS WELL.
IF HE COULD ESTIMATE HIS TIME OF ARRIVAL AND TRAVEL ROUTE JUST BY HEARING THE PLACE'S NAME...
BUT HIS CONVERSATION OVER THE PHONE WAS SHORT...
...AND HE SAID HE COULD GET THERE IN AN HOUR.

WHEN DID HE GET SO QUICK!?
I JUST PLANTED A WHOLE TON OF TRACKING DEVICES ON NARUMI-SAN'S PERSONAL EFFECTS!
BUT BEFORE I KNEW IT, HE'D REMOVED THEM ALL. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT!?
.....
UUM...
...THERE'RE SO MANY POSSIBILITIES...
IT DEPENDS ON HOW HE'S GETTING THERE, BUT...
PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE!!
YOU REALLY HAVE NO CHARMING POINTS.
SO WHAT DO WE DO?
IF YOU WANT A TRACKING DEVICE, I SLIPPED ONE INTO HIS POCKET BEFORE I GOT KNOCKED OUT.
PATAN (SHUT)
IT'S POSSIBLE HE HASN'T NOTICED IT YET.

OOH!
WELL DONE!
HERE'S THE RECEIVER.
SO IT'S CHEAP?
I NEVER DREAMED I'D ACTUALLY NEED IT.
BUT IT'S SMALL, SO...
...IT WON'T PICK UP THE SIGNAL UNTIL WE'RE WITHIN ONE KILOMETER OF HIM.
I SEE.
YOU MEAN YOU NEVER DREAMED NARUMI-SAN WOULD KNOCK YOU OUT.
MU (GRR)
GACHA (KLATCH)
ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH AYUMU NARUMI'S TYPICAL MOVE-MENTS?
YES. MORE OR LESS.

THEN WE'LL FOCUS OUR SEARCH ON THAT AREA AND SEE IF WE CAN PICK UP A SIGNAL ON THE RECEIVER.
KII (SQUEAK)
GOT IT?
UNDER-STOOD!

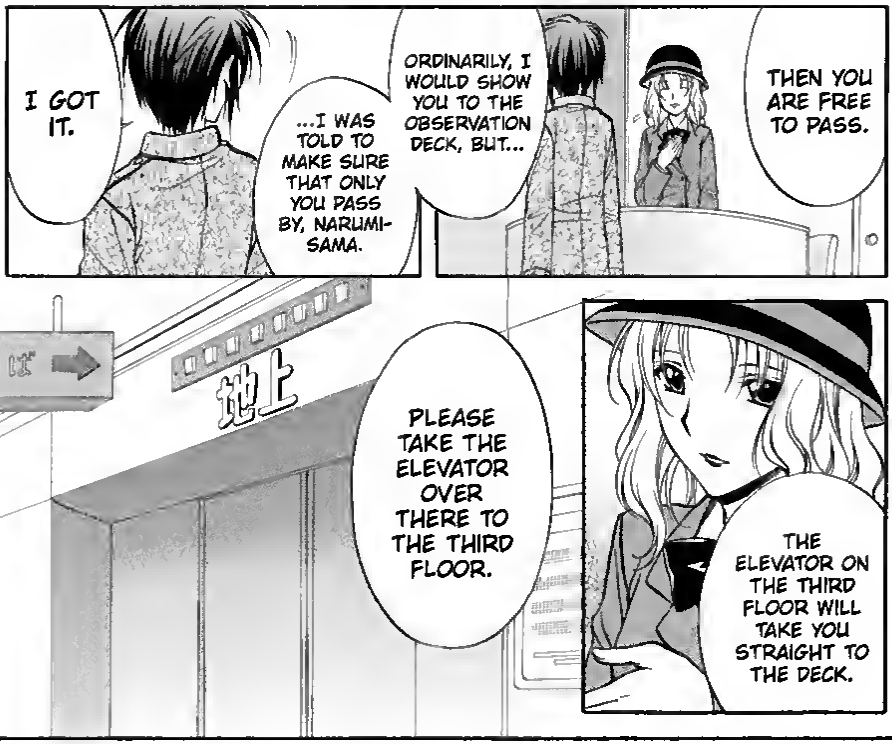
...BUT...
...WHY'S HE IN SUCH A HURRY AGAIN?

NARUMI-SAN WASN'T ACTING LIKE HIMSELF ...
I GOT WORD FROM KIRIE TSUCHIYA.
.....
SHE SAID IF HE FOUND OUT THE TRUTH, IT'D ALL BE OVER.

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT AYUMU NARUMI...
...MIGHT HAVE A SNEAKING SUSPICION OF WHAT THAT TRUTH IS.
THE TRUTH ...?
...DID SOME OUTRAGEOUS PIECE OF INFORMATION COME TO LIGHT?
KIYOTAKA AND AYUMU NARUMI'S DNA...
...IS AS IDENTICAL AS THAT OF TWIN BROTHERS.
HUH?

...COULD BE THE HIGHEST FORM OF ARTIFI-CIALLY-CREATED LIFE.
12
IT'S POSSIBLE THAT AYUMU NARUMI...

GIIA (WHIRR)
本日展望台点検のため
臨時閉鎖いたします。
SU (PASS)
SIGN: DUE TO MANDATORY INSPECTION, THE OBSERVATION DECK IS TEMPORARILY CLOSED.
AH.
I'M SORRY, BUT...
...WE'RE NOT TAKING VISITORS TODAY...
THERE'S AN IDIOT WITH A BOGUS-SOUNDING KANSAI ACCENT UP TOP, ISN'T THERE?
PEKO (BOW)
I APOLOGIZE FOR THE INCONVENIENCE HE'S CAUSED ...
...DOING SOMETHING SO ABSURD AS RENTING OUT THE ENTIRE TV TOWER.
R-RIGHT ...
... UM ... ARE YOU AYUMU NARUMI-SAMA, THEN?
YEAH.


I GOT IT.
...I WAS TOLD TO MAKE SURE THAT ONLY YOU PASS BY, NARUMI-SAMA.
ORDINARILY, I WOULD SHOW YOU TO THE OBSERVATION DECK, BUT...
THEN YOU ARE FREE TO PASS.
のりば
地上
PLEASE TAKE THE ELEVATOR OVER THERE TO THE THIRD FLOOR.
THE ELEVATOR ON THE THIRD FLOOR WILL TAKE YOU STRAIGHT TO THE DECK.

SIGN: LOBBY

CHA (CLICK)
...WHY WERE WE BORN...
...AND WHAT WILL WE DIE FOR?

.....
HIZUMI.
THE MOMENT HE HAD TO PONDER THAT QUESTION SERIOUSLY ...
...HE MUST HAVE FALLEN STRAIGHT INTO DEPRESSION.
YOU WERE PROBABLY DOWN IN THOSE DEEPEST DEPTHS...
...LONG BEFORE I EVER WAS...
SIGN: RADIO CAB 777
IF NARUMI-SAN AND HIS BROTHER, WHO ARE OVER TEN YEARS APART IN AGE, HAVE IDENTICAL DNA LIKE A SET OF TWINS...
...IT CAN ONLY MEAN YOU-KNOW-WHAT, RIGHT?

.....
I SHOULD ALSO MENTION THAT HIZUMI AND YAIBA'S DNA IS SIMILARLY IDENTICAL.
SO YOU THINK SO TOO?
...THOSE TWO WERE BORN SIXTEEN WHOLE YEARS AGO, RIGHT?
THAT POSSIBILITY CAME TO MIND, BUT...
AND WE BLADE CHILDREN TOO...
EVEN NOW, THE SCIENCE HASN'T BEEN FORMALLY ADOPTED.
DON'T TELL ME...
...WERE SIMILIARLY BORN FROM AN ADULTERATED REPRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY.
THE THEORY, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN CONFIRMED FOR A LONG TIME NOW.

TECHNO-LOGICALLY SPEAKING, THE PROCEDURE WOULD BE FAR MORE DIFFICULT, BUT...
...AS LONG AS THERE WERE PEOPLE WILLING TO TRY IT, FINDING THAT A SUCCESS STORY EXISTS NOW ISN'T COMPLETELY OUT OF THE QUESTION.
...BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE ...
...THAT NARUMI-SAN...
...IS HIS BROTHER KIYOTAKA'S CLONE...!
CHIIN (PING)
GAA (WHRR)

YOU GOING TO FIND YOUR SALVATION THAT WAY?
NAH.
NOT A CHANCE.
HOW 'BOUT YOU?
EVEN AFTER COMIN' THIS FAR, D'YOU STILL SEE YOUR HOPE?
EVEN IF I DON'T SEE IT...
...I KNOW IT'S OUT THERE SOME-WHERE.
WHAT KIND OF SALVATION ARE YOU LOOKING FOR...
...WAY UP HERE?
I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU...
...FOR YOU TO KNOW, RIGHT?
GO (PRESS)

YOU GOING TO FIND YOUR SALVATION THAT WAY?
EVEN AFTER COMIN' THIS FAR, D'YOU STILL SEE YOUR HOPE?
HOW 'BOUT YOU?
NAH.
NOT A CHANCE.

EVEN IF I DON'T SEE IT...
...I KNOW IT'S OUT THERE SOME-WHERE.
WHAT KIND OF SALVATION ARE YOU LOOKING FOR...
...WAY UP HERE?
I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU...
...FOR YOU TO KNOW, RIGHT?
GO (PRESS)

'COS AFTER YOU KNOW EVERYTHIN', YOU'RE GONNA BE MIGHTY DISTRAUGHT.
...IF YOU'RE GONNA SHOOT, DO IT NOW.
YEAH, BUT THE WAY THINGS STAND NOW...
...I CAN'T THINK OF ANY REASON FOR ME TO SHOOT YOU.
IT'S ME!
I KILLED KANON HILBERT!
... BUT ...
...IF I KILL YOU...
...IT'D MEAN HIS DEATH WAS IN VAIN.

...YEAH, WELL, WHILE YOU KEEP RUNNIN' AWAY LIKE THAT...
...BOTH YOU AND I WILL ALSO DIE IN VAIN.
I WILL WIPE OUT ANY HOPE YOU STILL BELIEVE EXISTS TILL THERE'S NOT A TRACE LEFT.
WRONG.
YOU DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE REALITY YET.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO RAN AWAY.
ALL THE FACTS ARE IN THERE.
YOU OUGHTA READ THAT.

...THE WORLD'S FIRST HUMAN CLONES.
SO THAT'S WHY...
SU (DROP)
...A REPORT ON THE RESEARCH THAT A SECRET TEAM OF KIYOTAKA'S WROTE UP.
IT'S THE RESEARCH I DID IN COLLEGE AND...
ALONG WITH YOURS TOO.
YEAH.
...THE REASON YOU WERE BORN AND THE REASON YOU'LL DIE?
IS THAT HOW YOU LEARNED ...
YOU AND I MIGHT BE...
.....

IT'S THE RESEARCH I DID IN COLLEGE AND...
...A REPORT ON THE RESEARCH THAT A SECRET TEAM OF KIYOTAKA'S WROTE UP.
IS THAT HOW YOU LEARNED ...
...THE REASON YOU WERE BORN AND THE REASON YOU'LL DIE?
YEAH.
ALONG WITH YOURS TOO.
.....
YOU AND I MIGHT BE...

...THE WORLD'S FIRST HUMAN CLONES.
SO THAT'S WHY...
SU (DROP)

...MY BROTHER AND I ARE SO MUCH ALIKE.
THERE ARE A LOT OF MISCONCEP-TIONS ABOUT IT, BUT...
...IT'S STILL TRUE THAT THE EXISTENCE OF CLONING TECHNOLOGY IS WIDELY KNOWN.
IN THE WORLD OF MAMMALS, THEY'VE ALREADY REPORTED ON SUCCESS IN S.C.N.T. WITH SHEEP AND CATS.
AND THERE'S DISCUSSION OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF CLONING HUMANS.
YES...
BUT...
...HUMAN CLONING IS REGARDED AS ETHICALLY QUESTION-ABLE.
ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT AS CREATING AN EXACT COPY OF A PARTICULAR PERSON.

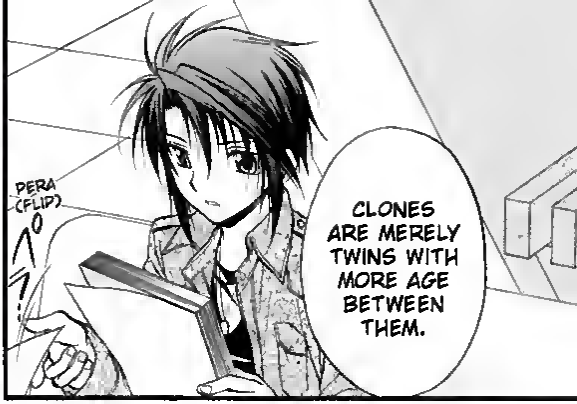
A CLONE IS SIMPLY SOMEONE WHO POSSESSES IDENTICAL GENETIC INFORMATION TO THE ORIGINAL.
YOU CAN'T VERY WELL CALL THAT AN EXACT COPY.
THAT'S WHERE THE MISCON-CEPTIONS LIE.
TO CREATE A CLONE, YOU EXTRACT THE NUCLEUS FROM ONE OF THE ORIGINAL'S SOMATIC CELLS...
...IMPLANT THAT NUCLEUS IN AN OVUM STRIPPED OF ITS OWN GENETIC CODE, AND CREATE A HUMAN CLONE EMBRYO.
ORIGINAL BODY
SOMATIC CELL'S NUCLEUS
OVULE
NUCLEUS EXTRACTION
SOMATIC CELL NUCLEAR TRANSFER
THEN THAT EMBRYO IS IMPLANTED IN A WOMAN'S UTERUS.
IMPLANTATION
AFTER THAT, IT IS BORN LIKE ANY OTHER CHILD.
THE CLONE IS BORN AS A REGULAR BABY...
...AND MATURES AT A REGULAR SPEED.
EVEN THOUGH IT'S A CLONE, IT'S NOT BORN AT THE SAME AGE OR PHYSICAL BUILD AS THE ORIGINAL DONOR.
IT CAN'T CLOSE THE GAP IN THEIR AGE DIFFERENCE.
AND OF COURSE, IT DOESN'T INHERIT THE ORIGINAL DONOR'S MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES.

BUT EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE THE SAME LOOKS AND GENES, EVERYONE KNOWS THEY'RE INDIVIDUALS.
IF YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT MATCHING GENETIC INFORMATION, THEN YOU'RE ALSO TALKING ABOUT IDENTICAL TWINS AND TRIPLETS.
EVEN IF THEIR GENETIC INFORMATION IS EXACTLY THE SAME, THEY'RE NOT COPIES OF ONE ANOTHER. THEY'RE TWO COMPLETELY SEPARATE INDIVIDUALS.
AND IF A CLONE IS MERELY A COPY OF A HUMAN, THEN...
...TWINS AND TRIPLETS ALSO COUNT AS COPIES.
YEAH.
I KNOW THAT.
AND A CLONE HAS THE HUGE AGE DIFFERENCE TO CONTEND WITH AS WELL.
GIVEN THAT, YOU COULD SAY THEY'RE EVEN MORE INDIVIDUAL THAN REGULAR TWINS.
...BUT...

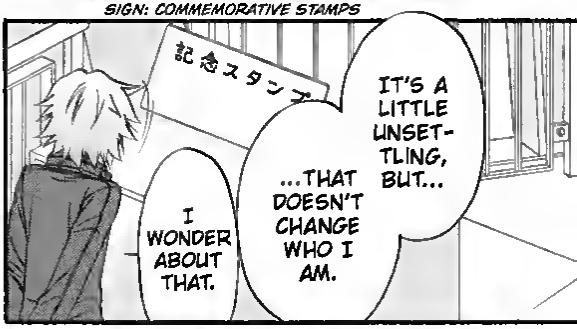
...IN NARUMI-SAN'S CASE...
...IS THAT AS CLEAR-CUT?
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH NARUMI-SAN'S LOST...
...BECAUSE OF HOW SIMILAR HE IS TO HIS BROTHER?

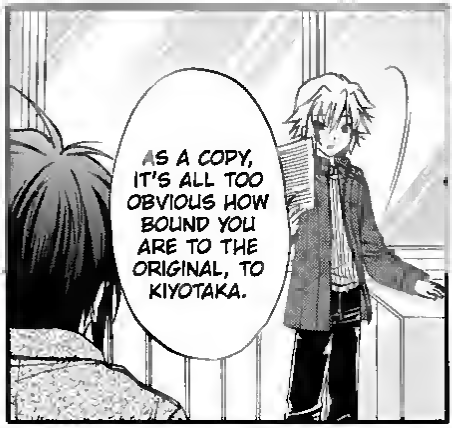
...FOR FINDIN' OUT THAT YOU'RE KIYOTAKA'S CLONE...

...YOU'RE NOT JARRED AT ALL.



SIGN: COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS





EVEN IF YOU CLONED A GENIUS OR THE PRESIDENT ...
...YOU WON'T NECESSARILY CREATE THE SAME GENIUS OR PRESIDENT.
JUST BECAUSE THERE'S SOMEONE WHO LOOKS LIKE YOU, THAT PERSON'S NOT YOU ...
SO IT'S NOTHING TO GET FLUSTERED OVER.
PEOPLE DIFFER BASED ON THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND UPBRINGING.
BUT MY BROTHER AND I HAVE COMPLETELY OPPOSITE PERSONALITIES.
PETA (STAMP)
SO I'M MORE THE PERFECT SAMPLE IN THE EYES OF A GENETIC SKEPTIC.
EVEN SO, IF YOU WEREN'T KIYOTAKA'S CLONE...
...YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE HAD EVERYTHIN' YOU EVER WANTED STOLEN BY HIM.
THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T GET WHAT THEY WANT.
I'M NOT THAT SPECIAL.
BUT SO LONG AS THE ORIGINAL STILL STICKS AROUND...
...THE COPY WILL CONTINUE BEING ROBBED.

...EVERY-THING THAT'S BEEN TAKEN FROM ME.
I'LL GET BACK...
THAT'S FINE BY ME.
...I WON'T LET IT BE TAKEN AGAIN.
AND NO MATTER HOW HARD IT IS...
WHY ELSE DO YOU THINK YOU WERE CREATED IN THE FIRST PLACE?
BIRI (RIP)
...EITHER WAY...
...YOU'LL STILL BE ROBBED.

IF NARUMI-SAN'S A CLONE...
...THEN HIZUMI-SAN'S A CLONE TOO, RIGHT?
THIS SCENARIO IS JUST TOO WEIRD...
WE'VE ALL BEEN JERKED AROUND BY THAT DESPICABLE SETUP.
AT THIS POINT, SUCH A CORRELATION IS NO SURPRISE.
BUT EVEN SO...
...IT'S STILL WORRI-SOME.
TO THINK THAT THE LITTLE BROTHERS OF GOD AND THE DEVIL ARE CLONES.
IT'S SO PLANNED OUT IT'S SICKENING.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

PA (FLASH)
...WHAT KIND OF NEED DID THEY HAVE FOR THEM?
THE PEOPLE WHO MADE THOSE TWO...
CLONES ARE DELIBERATELY MADE FOR A SPECIFIC REASON.
BURO (VROOM)
I ALREADY KNOW IN HIZUMI'S CASE.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
YAIBA MIGHT HAVE SECRETLY BUILT A CLONING LAB WITHIN HIS ORGANIZATION...
...AND ACTUALLY ACHIEVED SUCCESS SIXTEEN YEARS AGO.
AND IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE WHO WILL CARRY OUT YOUR OWN DREAMS AND AMBITIONS, YOU ULTIMATELY ARRIVE AT A CLONE.
YAIBA CREATED THE BLADE CHILDREN TO SATURATE THIS WORLD WITH THOSE WHOSE GENES WERE SIMILAR TO HIS.
SO IT WOULDN'T BE A FAR REACH FOR HIM TO CREATE A CLONE...
...WHO CARRIED HIS EXACT SAME GENES AND LET IT LOOSE INTO THE WORLD.

BUT...
...WHEN IT COMES TO NARUMI-SAN...
BACK THEN, KIYOTAKA WAS A TEENAGE PIANIST AND HAD ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA ABOUT YAIBA.
I CAN'T THINK OF ANY REASON WHY KIYOTAKA WOULD CLONE HIMSELF.
SO, JUDGING BY HIS SITUATION, HIS PARENTS MUST HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DECISION.
BUT AS FOR WHY THE FAMILY WOULD NEED TO HAVE A CLONE "LITTLE BROTHER" ...
-BZZZ-
-BZZZ-
.....!
PI (BEEP)
RUTH-KUN!
WHERE'S AYUMU-KUN!?

Where are you?
I JUST GOT TO THE AIRPORT AND AM TAKING A TAXI TO HIS PLACE.
I MESSED UP AND LET HIM GET AWAY.
HE MIGHT ALREADY BE IN CONTACT WITH HIZUMI.
WE'RE LOOKING FOR HIM RIGHT NOW.
...YES.
WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND OUT?
SO HIZUMI AND AYUMU NARUMI REALLY ARE CLONES?
SO THINGS ARE GOING JUST AS KIYOTAKA THOUGHT THEY WOULD...!
WE REALLY CAN'T STOP HIM, CAN WE...!?
SFX: GIRI (GRIP)

AYUMU-KUN'S CRAZY PARENTS TOLD ME WHAT THEY COULD.
AND IT CAME OUT IN HIZUMI'S RESEARCH REPORT AND KIYOTAKA'S SECRET REPORT.
There's no mistaking it.
...WELL, THEN.
THE NUMBER ONE QUESTION IS...
GU! (SQUEEZE)
.....
...why was Ayumu Narumi needed as a clone?

AYUMU-KUN IS WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL...
...A TEST BODY...
HIRA (FWIP)
ひら
...CREATED FOR KIYOTAKA.

Spiral
THE BONDS OF REASONING

CHAPTER SEVENTY
THE DARKNESS THAT ENVELOPS YOU

A TEST BODY...
...FOR KIYOTAKA?
CARS AND ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES HAVE THE SAME THING, RIGHT?
A TEST PROTOTYPE TO SEE HOW MUCH HEAT OR IMPACT A PRODUCT CAN TAKE.
TO SEE WHAT CONDITIONS IT TAKES TO BREAK IT.

YOU KNOW HOW KIYOTAKA'S MOTHER USED TO WANT TO BE A PIANIST, RIGHT?
Yeah.
AND HOW WHEN SHE INJURED HER HANDS IN AN ACCIDENT AND HAD TO GIVE UP HER DREAM...
...AND WHEN KIYOTAKA WALKED AWAY FROM PIANO-PLAYING ...
...HER BODY BROKE DOWN FROM THE EMOTIONAL SHOCK OF IT ALL.
...SHE WENT MAD AND FORCED HER DREAM ONTO KIYOTAKA, RIGHT?
...THAT'S RIGHT.
THAT'S HOW MUCH KIYOTAKA'S MOTHER HAD INVESTED IN HIM.
WHEN KIYOTAKA ROSE ABOVE HER EXPECTATIONS AND BECAME SUCCESSFUL AS A PIANIST ...
...HIS MOTHER STARTED TO WORRY.
SHE WORRIED WHAT WOULD BECOME OF KIYOTAKA IF HE INJURED HIS HANDS AND COULD NEVER RECOVER.

SHE WORRIED HOW SHE WOULD PROTECT KIYOTAKA'S SUBLIME TALENT.
HIS MOTHER'S HANDS NEVER FULLY HEALED ...
...FROM THE DAMAGE DONE BY THE FOLLOW-UP TREATMENTS SHE UNDERTOOK AFTER THE ACCIDENT.
ALTHOUGH SHE RECOVERED WELL ENOUGH FROM THE SURGERY...
...SHE DIDN'T HAVE THE FINE CONTROL TO PLAY THE PIANO AS SHE HAD BEFORE.
SO SHE TRIED ALL SORTS OF REMEDIES.
But as a result...
...she ended up contracting severe arthritis as a side effect.
Her dream was doomed never to return again.
SHE FEARED THAT THE SAME MIGHT HAPPEN TO KIYOTAKA...
...SO SHE GOT TO THINKING.

AND THEN IT HIT HER.
BUT SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WOULD BE BEST FOR KIYOTAKA'S BODY.
WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST TREATMENT IN CASE HE DID GET INTO AN ACCIDENT?
IF ONLY SHE HAD A BODY WITH KIYOTAKA'S EXACT SAME CONDITIONS.
IF ONLY SHE COULD TEST THE OPTIONS.
WITH A BODY THAT WAS LIKE KIYOTAKA'S ...
...SHE'D HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO DETERMINE THAT BODY'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.
As long as she had that...
...she could run all sorts of tests.
A human experiment ...
...for Kiyotaka and for him alone.

THAT'S WHY THEY MADE HIS CLONE...!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT LED HER TO COME TO THAT DECISION AT THE TIME, BUT...
...SHE CONTACTED A RESEARCH FACILITY THAT SPECIALIZED IN CLONING ...
...AND CREATED KIYOTAKA'S CLONE WHILE MAKING IT LOOK LIKE A NORMAL PREGNANCY AND DELIVERY.
THAT'S HOW THE LITTLE BROTHER CLONE KNOWN AS AYUMU WAS BORN.
AS A TEST SUBJECT TO SEE WHAT WORKED FOR AND AGAINST KIYOTAKA'S BODY.
A LAB RAT.

His mother thought of Ayumu-kun as a storehouse for Kiyotaka's spare parts!!
SINCE THEY'RE GENETICALLY IDENTICAL, THE BODY'S IMMUNE SYSTEM WOULDN'T REJECT THE FOREIGN COMPONENTS.
HE'D HAVE A SAFE SURGERY.
APPARENTLY SHE EVEN CONSIDERED THAT IF KIYOTAKA UNDERWENT SURGERY AND NEEDED A BLOOD TRANSFUSION OR TRANSPLANT...
...THEY COULD USE AYUMU-KUN'S BLOOD AND ORGANS.
AYUMU-KUN...
...FROM THE VERY GET-GO...
...WAS CREATED TO BE SACRIFICED TO KIYOTAKA...
...AND BE ROBBED BY HIM.
WHAT WAS REALLY STOLEN FROM AYUMU WAS...

HIRA (FWAP)
IT'S ALL VERY CONVINC-ING.
I DON'T REMEMBER MY MOM EVER CALLING ME BY MY NAME.
AND MY DAD, WHO ONLY CARED ABOUT MY MOM...
...WOULD SOMETIMES LOOK AT ME LIKE HE PITIED ME.
...HIS OWN FATE, DECIDED FOR HIM BY HIS MOTHER ...!!

WHEN MY BROTHER ABANDONED THE PIANO ...
...MY MOM DIDN'T SEEM TO NEED ME ANYMORE...
...WHICH IS WHY I NEVER FELT I HAD A PLACE IN THE NARUMI HOUSEHOLD.
Y'KNOW ...
...AFTER KIYOTAKA DROPPED PIANO, YOUR MOM DIDN'T SEE THE POINT IN HAVIN' HIM AROUND...
...AND AS HIS EXPERI-MENTAL BODY, THERE WASN'T MUCH POINT IN KEEPIN' YOU AROUND EITHER.
IT'S BECAUSE OF PEOPLE WHO THINK THAT WAY THAT THERE IS OPPOSITION TO CLONING TECHNOLOGY.
...BUT MY MOM WAS RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING.
WHEN MY BROTHER QUIT MUSIC...
...MY MOM WASN'T INTERESTED IN MY TAKING UP PIANO AFTER HIM.
MY MOM DIDN'T FORCE THE PIANO ON ME.

USUALLY PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT CLONING THINK THAT WHEN THE ORIGINAL GOES BAD ...
...THE CLONE BECOMES AN EASY SPARE.
BUT MY MOM DIDN'T SEE ME AS A REPLACEMENT FOR MY BROTHER.
IT SHOWS SHE TREATED ME AS A COMPLETELY UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL.
IT'S AT LEAST A LITTLE REASSURIN' TO HEAR HER SAY THAT.
MUSIC DOESN'T COME FROM THE GENES.
IT COMES FROM THE SPIRIT.
APPARENTLY, YOUR MOM SAID THIS TOO...
MY MOM REALLY HAD IT RIGHT.

AYUMU.
SO...
...NOW WHAT DO YOU DO?
...
THERE'S NOTHING FOR ME TO DO.
SURE, I MAY HAVE BEEN BORN JUST TO BE ROBBED.
BUT I'VE BEEN GIVEN THE CHANCE TO DEFY THAT FATE.
SO I SHOULD TAKE BACK WHAT'S BEEN STOLEN FROM ME.
AND NEVER LET GO OF IT AGAIN.

IT CHANGES NOTHING.
...STOP LYIN' TO YOURSELF.
YOU SHOULD'VE REALIZED BY NOW...
IF IT WAS THAT EASY...
...I WOULDN'T NEED YOU.

WHO CARES WHY NARUMI-SAN WAS BORN!!?

REGARD-LESS OF HOW HE WAS CONCEIVED ...
...OR HOW HIS PARENTS ABUSED HIM...
... NARUMI-SAN IS FREE!
HE CAN DECIDE HIS OWN FUTURE FOR HIMSELF!!

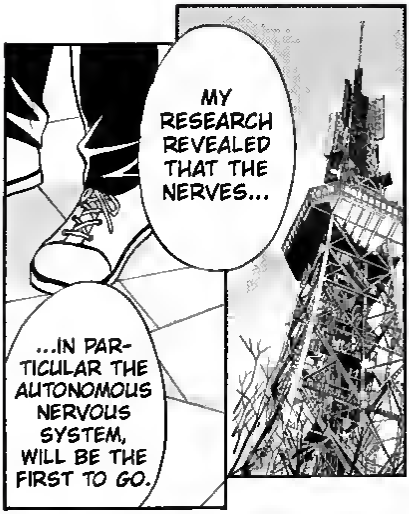
GU (GRIP)
.....
THE REASON BEHIND HIS BIRTH HAS NO BEARING!

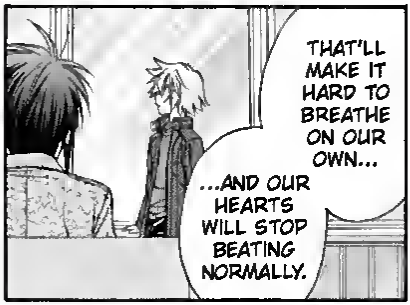
And this is something nobody saw coming.
Almost as though fate itself had planted it to close off the cycle...
WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?
THE SADDEST TRUTH OF ALL.
BUT THERE'S MORE.
Did you hear that?
YEAH.
SHE'S GOT A POINT.
CLONING TECHNOLOGY IS STILL BEING RESEARCHED AND PERFECTED TO THIS DAY.
THINK ABOUT IT.
YOU AND I ...
...ARE INDIVIDUALS WITH OUR OWN WILLS AND LIVES, NO MATTER HOW WE WERE BORN.
SO CLONES BORN SIXTEEN YEARS AGO...
...COULDN'T BE WITHOUT FLAWS TOO, DON'T YOU THINK?

YOU COULD SAY THAT THERE'S NOTHIN' HOLDIN' US DOWN ANYMORE.
AND YET...
...WE JUST CAN'T ESCAPE OUR FATE.
IN MODERN SCIENCE, THE SUCCESS RATE OF CLONING MAMMALS IS VERY LOW.
AND EVEN WHEN SCIENTISTS DO SUCCEED ...
...THE CLONES' SURVIVAL RATE IS EVEN LOWER.
There's evidence that in most cases, abnormalities appear in the genes.
Even if there's a possibility that they will resolve these problems in the future...
...in the present day, there are grave risks to the lives born through cloning procedures.

IN BOTH YOUR AND MY GENES, YOU CAN SEE THE SAME ABNORMALITY.
THAT PROBLEM HASN'T REARED ITS HEAD IN US YET, BUT...
...IT'S SURE TO PRESENT ITSELF ONE OF THESE DAYS.
ONE OF THESE DAYS...
AHH.
KASA (RUSTLE)
カサ
YOU MEAN THIS.
A TIME BOMB HAS BEEN PLANTED AT BOTH AYUMU-KUN'S AND HIZUMI'S GENETIC LEVEL.
IN THE LATTER HALF OF THEIR TEENAGE YEARS, FOR BOTH AYUMU NARUMI AND HIZUMI MIZUSHIRO ...
...ALMOST ALL ORGAN FUNCTION WILL DETERIORATE ...
...AND HEMATO-GENOUS PROCESSES WILL DEGRADE SEVERELY...
NEITHER OF THEIR BODIES...

...WILL LAST MORE THAN A FEW MORE YEARS!!
AT THE LATEST, THEY'LL PERISH JUST AS THEY REACH FULL MATURITY ...
...HUH.


MY RESEARCH REVEALED THAT THE NERVES...
...IN PARTICULAR THE AUTONOMOUS NERVOUS SYSTEM, WILL BE THE FIRST TO GO.


THAT'LL MAKE IT HARD TO BREATHE ON OUR OWN...
...AND OUR HEARTS WILL STOP BEATING NORMALLY.

WELL ...
...EITHER WAY, IT DOESN'T CHANGE THE END RESULT.
THIS GENETIC ANOMALY IS THE RESULT OF CLONING.
WE WERE BORN WITH BODIES THAT WILL LAST ONLY EIGHTEEN OR NINETEEN YEARS IF WE'RE LUCKY.

BOTH MY RESEARCH AND THE RESEARCH FROM THE TEAM THAT KIYOTAKA ASSEMBLED ARRIVED AT THE SAME CONCLUSION.
...THE DETAILED DATA'S ALL THERE.
AND STILL YOU DON'T BELIEVE IT?
EVEN AFTER I CHECKED THE NUMBERS AGAIN AND AGAIN, I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT EITHER.
.....
BASA (RUSTLE)
...IF YOU BELIEVE IT...
...THEN I'LL BELIEVE IT.
...IS THAT PROOF ENOUGH FOR YOU?

...KILLED KANON HILBERT.
YOU...
THE TRUTH THAT DROVE YOU TO DO THAT...
...IS JUST THIS, RIGHT?
BASA (RUSTLE)

...KILLED KANON HILBERT.
YOU...
THE TRUTH THAT DROVE YOU TO DO THAT...
BASA (RUSTLE)
...IS JUST THIS, RIGHT?

IN THE END...
...EVEN IF YOU FIGHT WITH ALL YOU'VE GOT...
...AND TAKE EVERY-THIN' BACK...
THERE'S NOTHIN' YOU CAN REGAIN.
...YOU'LL STILL BE STRANGLED BY THE GENES YOU INHERITED FROM KIYOTAKA ...
...UNTIL YOUR VERY LIFE IS TAKEN FROM YOU.
THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN MAKE YOURS.
HIRA (WAFT)
YOU WERE CREATED TO BE THAT WAY FROM THE VERY START.
THAT'S YOU AND KIYOTAKA.
THE COPY AND THE ORIGINAL'S ...

AND WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE OKAY WITH THAT!?
AYUMU NARUMI'S GOING TO DIE EVEN BEFORE WE DO?
YOU'RE SAYING HE WAS BORN WITH AN EVEN CRUELER FATE PLACED ON HIM!?

...ABSOLUTE RELATION-SHIP.

HE WASN'T EVEN GIVEN THE CHANCE OR TIME NEEDED TO FIGHT IT!!
HE WAS NEVER GIVEN ANYTHING TO BEGIN WITH.
HE'S IN FAR MORE TRAGIC A POSITION THAN ANY OF YOU.
...THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT.
The Blade Children's fate is cruel, that's true.
You have been hunted as cursed children since you were very young...
...and have had people after your lives...
...and been warned that someday you will lose control of your very minds.
But...
...you have each other.

...you are never alone.
So during your hopeless fight...
...even though you probably lose heart plenty of times...
...with whom you share your fate at a spiritual level.
You have friends who are in the same situation ...
That's how you've held on all this time.
That surely has been some comfort to you.

TO MAKE HIM ENDURE THAT HOPE-LESSNESS ON HIS OWN...
...BUT AYUMU NARUMI'S ALONE.
...IS TOO CRUEL.
AND THERE'S NOBODY TO SHARE HIS FATE WITH HIM...
.....
...THAT'S WHY IT'S ALL OVER.
THIS IS WHERE THE WHEEL OF FATE IS CEASES TO TURN.

THE FINAL PIECE TO ERADICATE THE TWO GODS THAT YOU SPOKE OF, RUTH-KUN...
...IS THIS.
...DO YOU THINK ...
...I'M HAPPY COMPARED TO YOU?
EVER SINCE I WAS BORN, THERE WAS NO THIEVIN' "BIG BROTHER" FOR ME TO DEAL WITH.
I WAS NUMBER ONE.
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I BASKED IN THE BELIEF THAT I HAD NOTHIN' HOLDIN' ME BACK.
KNOWIN' I WAS LIKE THAT...
...DO YOU THINK I WAS HAPPY COMPARED TO YOU?

...I DOUBT IT...
...AND BOWLED YOU OVER.
...WHAT HAD SUPPORTED YOU ALL THIS TIME, SUDDENLY BETRAYED YOU...
BUT FOR YOU... ...WHAT YOU HAD BELIEVED FOR SO LONG...
SINCE I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ROBBED, I'M USED TO IT.
HEH...
...IS FAR HARDER TO DEAL WITH THAN WHAT I HAD TO.
I THINK THAT...

KIYOTAKA KNEW ABOUT ME BEIN' A CLONE, JUST AS HE KNEW ABOUT THE BLADE CHILDREN.
BUT HE LEFT ME ALONE TO SEE WHAT WOULD BECOME OF ME IF LEFT TO MY OWN DEVICES.
...I MOVED IN WITH A SAVER COUPLE THAT RAISED ME AND TOOK CARE OF ME.
...AND CRUSHED HIS WHOLE PLAN...
WHEN KIYOTAKA KILLED YAIBA...
A BOY SENT DOWN FROM HEAVEN.
A REAL ANGEL.
A GOD.
I WAS INCREDIBLE AS A CHILD.
AND SOON AFTER THAT, I MET KIYOTAKA.
ABOUT YAIBA.
AND BEIN' A CLONE.
AND KIYOTAKA.
THEN ...
...WHEN I TURNED TEN...
...THE COUPLE THAT HAD RAISED ME TOLD ME ALL THE SECRETS ABOUT MY CONCEPTION.

HE TOLD ME MY GUARDIANS FEARED ME.
BECAUSE IF LEFT AS I WAS, I'D BECOME LIKE YAIBA.
...SEE?
WHEN I LEARNED EVERY-THIN'...
...I WAS SURPRISED, AS YOU CAN IMAGINE.
BUT I DIDN'T FEEL ANY KIND OF DESPAIR.
EVEN WHEN THEY TOLD ME I MIGHT BECOME A DEVIL LIKE YAIBA HAD BEEN, I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHIN'.
IN FACT, I THOUGHT I'D CHANGE MY FATE THEN.
I SAW IT AS THE FIRST REAL CHALLENGE I WOULD HAVE TO FACE IN MY ENTIRE LIFE.
I WAS DOWNRIGHT EXCITED.
...I...

I THOUGHT THEY WOULD ALLOW ME TO BREAK THE CURSE THAT THE DEVIL HAD LEFT BEHIND.
I DIDN'T BELIEVE MY ABILITIES WERE MEANT TO INHERIT YAIBA'S PLAN.
WHEN SOMEBODY WHO LOOKS LIKE THE DEVIL ACTUALLY CHOOSES OF HIS OWN WILL TO BECOME A GOD INSTEAD AND SAVE EVERYONE...
...THAT'S PRETTY IMPRESSIVE, RIGHT?
LIKE A LEGENDARY SAVIOR.
...THOUGHT I WOULD SAVE THE BLADE CHILDREN.
I WAS PRACTICALLY OVERFLOW-IN' WITH HOPE.
I FELT FULFILLED FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER.

I GATHERED MY INFORMATION...
...AND MAPPED OUT HOW I'D SAVE EVERYONE.
PASHI (WHAP)
THROUGH THE PROCESS, I FOUND OUT ABOUT YOU...
...AND THAT YOU WERE A CLONE LIKE ME.
BUT AT THE TIME YOU WERE SO NEGATIVE AND NOT VERY USEFUL, SO I IGNORED YOU.
WHEN I TURNED THIRTEEN ...
...I ENTERED COLLEGE FOR GENETIC RESEARCH.
NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, YOU CAN'T DENY THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CURSE AND BLOOD TIES.
I COULDN'T FIND A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE ORGANIZATION, BUT...
...THERE WAS SO MUCH GENETIC INFORMATION ...
...I THOUGHT I STILL HAD A CHANCE AT WORKIN' OUT A SOLUTION.
I HAD ACTUALLY COME TO A REAL IMPASSE...
...BUT I FIGURED I HAD NOTHIN' TO LOSE.
...I FELT LIKE GIVIN' IT MY ALL.

...SO THAT'S WHEN...
...YOU LEARNED OF YOUR OWN LIMITA-TIONS.
...I WOULD HAVE NEVER IN MY WILDEST DREAMS THOUGHT A TIME BOMB HAD BEEN PLANTED IN MY GENES.
TURNED OUT I HADN'T BEEN GIVEN A FATE WHERE I COULD BE ANYTHIN' I WANTED TO BE.
AND ON TOP OF THAT, I COULDN'T FIND A WAY TO SAVE THE BLADE CHILDREN.
SO MUCH FOR BECOMIN' A GOD.
BOSU (POOMF)
SO MUCH FOR THE SAVIOR OF LEGEND ...!

I WAS A PUPPET TO FATE!!
MY OWN LIFE WAS OUT OF MY CONTROL.
NO...
...MORE IMPORTANTLY, I REALIZED SOMETHIN' FOR THE FIRST TIME BACK THEN.
I LEARNED THAT I WAS ALL ALONE IN THIS WORLD.
NO FRIENDS TO WALK WITH ME.
I REALIZED THERE WAS NOBODY WORKIN' TOWARD MY SALVATION ...
THERE WAS NOBODY WHO LOOKED UP TO ME AND NOBODY WHO LOOKED DOWN ON ME.
NOBODY COULD UNDERSTAND MY JOYS OR SUFFERIN'.
WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, NOBODY UNDER-STANDS ME.

I REALIZED THAT WAS WHAT DESPAIR IS.
DEATH AND POWERLESSNESS THAT INEVITABLY OVERCOMES YOU...
...WITH NOBODY THERE TO UNDERSTAND YOUR PAIN...!
NO MATTER HOW CAPABLE I WAS, I COULDN'T GRANT ANYONE'S WISHES
AND IN THE END, I'D BE ALONE.
IT'S NOTHIN' BUT DARKNESS!
TOTAL DARKNESS!!
BUT...

THAT DARKNESS ...
...ISN'T FOR YOU ALONE.
YOU'RE NOT REALLY ALONE.
KOKURI (NOD)
...YOU AND I ARE THE SAME.
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO SHOULDERS THE SAME DESPAIR AS ME.
KUSHA (RUSTLE)
...THAT'S RIGHT.
AYUMU ...

WHEN I REALIZED THAT...
...I FINALLY FOUND SOMETHIN' I COULD HANG ON TO.
TO AYUMU NARUMI, HIZUMI IS THE ONLY ONE WHO SHARES HIS FATE...
IN A DESPAIR WORSE THAN OURS...
...CAN HE TURN DOWN HIS ONE AND ONLY COMRADE?
IF HE ACCEPTS HIZUMI, THE PATH TO OUR SALVATION WILL BE COMPLETELY CLOSED OFF...
...BUT HE HAS ALREADY LOST SIGHT OF OUR SAVING LIGHT AND HAS FALLEN INTO A DARKNESS WHERE HE MUST SEEK HIS OWN SALVATION...

...BY MYSELF ANYMORE ...!
...I CAN'T TAKE THIS DARKNESS ...
PATA (PLIP)
IF HE DENIES HIZUMI, HE'LL BE RELIN-QUISHING HIS OWN SALVATION ...
SAVE ME.
PATA
BOTA (DRIP)
THERE'S NO WAY AYUMU CAN REFUSE HIM!!
AYUMU ...

IF HE DENIES HIZUMI, HE'LL BE RELIN-QUISHING HIS OWN SALVATION ...
PATA (PLIP)
SAVE ME.
...I CAN'T TAKE THIS DARKNESS ...
PATA
BOTA (DRIP)
AYUMU ...
THERE'S NO WAY AYUMU CAN REFUSE HIM!!

...BY MYSELF ANYMORE ...!

SPIRAL

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE
GOOD-BYE SONG (PART 1)

IT'S PICKING UP THE TRANS-MITTER'S SIGNAL!!
PI (BEEP)
THIS IS...
...THE TV TOWER!
THE TV TOWER!
DRIVER, CHANGE COURSE!
PLEASE HEAD TO THE TV TOWER!
NARUMI-SAN AND HIZUMI-SAN ARE AT THE TV TOWER!
TELL KIRIE-SAN TOO!
PLEASE STEP ON IT!!
...NO.

IT'S TOO LATE.
PI (BEEP)
.....!
OUR CHANCES HAVE ALREADY BEEN CRUSHED.
NO MATTER HOW AYUMU NARUMI DEALS WITH HIZUMI, THE OUTCOME'S ALREADY BEEN DECIDED.
IT'S NO USE.
PATAN (CLICK)
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, IT'S TOO LATE!?
WE WON'T KNOW UNTIL WE GET THERE!!

...HE...
...IS GOING TO KILL KIYOTAKA IN THE END.
AND THEN...
...THE WHEEL OF FATE WILL STOP.
...HIZUMI.
DON'T YOU KNOW?

THIS WAS ALL CONTRIVED BY MY BROTHER.
...MY BROTHER ...
...MUST HAVE KNOWN EVERYTHING FROM THE VERY START.
THAT IF YOU DID GENETIC RESEARCH, YOU'D COME FACE TO FACE WITH THE MOST DISMAL REALITY ON YOUR OWN...
...THAT OUR LIFESPANS ARE SEVERELY LIMITED.
THAT YOU AND I ARE BOTH CLONES...
AND ...
CHA (CLICK)
...THAT WE'D ULTIMATELY END UP IN THIS RIDICULOUS SITUATION.

AND YET...
...MY BROTHER DIDN'T STOP.
IN FACT, HE PLANNED EVERYTHING SO THAT WOULD HAPPEN.
...AND PUT IN THE SAME POSITION YOU'RE IN.
HE MADE ME FIGHT THE BLADE CHILDREN.
MADE ME REGAIN SOME HOPE, ONLY TO BE KNOCKED INTO DARKNESS AGAIN...

...ARE THE WRETCHED RIGHT AND LEFT WINGS...
WE...
...TIED TOGETHER BY MY BROTHER'S CAREFUL ORCHES-TRATIONS.

...EVEN KNOWING THIS, DO YOU STILL MEAN TO WALK RIGHT INTO MY BROTHER'S HAND?
...HIZUMI...
IF YOU ASK TO BE SAVED BY ME HERE AND NOW ...
...IT'LL BE EXACTLY AS MY BROTHER PLANNED ...!!
...I KNOW THAT.
BUT WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I HATE KIYOTAKA ...
GOSHI (RUB)
...WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?
IN THIS DARK-NESS...
...WHAT CAN EITHER OF US...
...WISH FOR IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD?

GOSHI
GOSHI
TON (THUMP)
...YEAH, BUT...
I'LL HAVE TO KILL KIYOTAKA NARUMI, SEE?
BUT...
...IF WE FOLLOW ALONG...
...I'LL HAVE TO KILL MY BROTHER.
...THAT'S WHAT KIYOTAKA WANTS...

...A CONCLUSION WHERE EVERYTHING REVERTS BACK TO ZERO.

...BUT...
PI (BEEP)
PI
...WHY SHOULD NARUMI-SAN KILL HIS BROTHER?
WHAT REASON ...?
HA (GASP)

AND NOW HE'S IN DANGER OF HAVING HIS LIFE AND ANY CHANCE TO FIGHT BACK TAKEN AWAY BY KIYOTAKA.
HE HAS PLENTY OF REASONS FOR KILLING KIYOTAKA.
HOW MANY THINGS HAS KIYOTAKA STOLEN FROM HIM?
HOW MUCH INJURY HAS AYUMU NARUMI SUSTAINED?
...HE CAN ONLY DO SO BY KILLING KIYOTAKA HIMSELF.
...OR GIVE MEANING TO HIS EXISTENCE ...
IF HE'S GOING TO FREE HIS SOUL...
...THE CLONE WILL BE LEFT WITH NOTHING OF HIS OWN.
UNLESS HE KILLS THE ORIGINAL...

HAVING LOST SIGHT OF A WAY TO SAVE THE BLADE CHILDREN...
...IN LIGHT OF A FATE CRUELER THAN ANY HE'S EVER MET...
...AYUMU NARUMI CAN'T HELP BUT COME TO THAT CONCLUSION.
AND HE CAN'T REFUSE HIZUMI.
IF HE JOINS HIZUMI, WHO KILLED KANON...
...IN THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO ...
...HE WON'T HESITATE TO DIRTY HIS OWN HANDS.
...EVEN IF HE DENIES HIZUMI IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE ...
...TO STICK TO HIS OBLIGATION WITH US, IT'LL ALL END THE SAME.

IF HE LOSES HIZUMI, WHO IS HIS SALVATION ...
...HE'LL TEAR UP HIS OWN HEART.
KILLING HIZUMI... ...WILL PROBABLY ONLY DRIVE HIM TO KILL KIYOTAKA MORE QUICKLY.
EITHER WAY, THE WHEEL OF FATE WILL BE BROUGHT TO A CLOSE.
...WHA?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
SOME-THING'S STRANGE!
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE SUGGESTING HIS BROTHER KIYOTAKA...
...PLANNED EVERYTHING TO FORCE NARUMI-SAN TO KILL HIM!?
PRECISELY.

AND AFTER HE KILLS KIYOTAKA, WHAT HAPPENS THEN?
ONLY A GOD CAN KILL A GOD.
WHAT HAPPENS ...
ONLY AYUMU NARUMI, WHO IS A GOD, CAN KILL KIYOTAKA.
BOTH HIZUMI AND AYUMU NARUMI ...
...WILL DIE, HAVING NEVER BECOME ANYTHING.
AND SO GOD AND THE DEVIL WILL DISAPPEAR FROM THE BOARD.

AND THE BLADE CHILDREN WILL ALL BE KILLED BY HUMAN HANDS.
IN THAT WAY...
...ALL THE ANOMALIES VANISH FROM EARTH.
YOU MEAN ...
...IT GOES BACK TO ZERO ...!
GI (SQUEEZE)
...YES.
THAT'S THE MOST IMMACULATE ENDING.
ALL THE PIECES ON THE BOARD USED, WITH NONE GOING TO WASTE.
THEY OFFSET AND CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT.
A PERFECT SYSTEM.

KIYOTAKA PLANS TO GIVE UP HIS LIFE AS A GOD TO THAT FATE.
I MEAN ...
...YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN KILL HIM.
...YOU CAN KILL KIYOTAKA.
I TRIED TIME AND TIME AGAIN MYSELF, BUT IT WAS NO GOOD.
EVEN THOUGH KIYOTAKA LOOKED LIKE HE WASN'T TRYING TO PROTECT HIMSELF...
...SOMEHOW I COULDN'T TOUCH HIM.

...TRIED TO KILL MYSELF DOZENS OF TIMES.
...AND YOU'D PROBABLY NEVER GUESS, BUT I ALSO...
AND IT'S PATHETIC TO ADMIT ...
I WANTED TO FREE MYSELF FROM THIS FEELING OF HOPELESS-NESS.
I WANTED TO ESCAPE FROM THIS DARKNESS AS QUICKLY AS I COULD.
...WHEN I GAVE IN TO THE FACT THAT THIS WAS MY FATE.
IT MUST'VE BEEN THE FOURTEENTH OR FIFTEENTH TIME...
BUT I COULDN'T DIE.
I DON'T EVEN HAVE CONTROL OVER MY LIFE.
SOMEHOW, THERE'D BE ALL THESE COINCIDENCES THAT WOULD END IT IN FAILURE.
I'D WAKE UP IN THE HOSPITAL UNDER STRICT SUPERVISION.
UNTIL WHAT HAS TO BE DONE IS DONE, I'M NOT EVEN ALLOWED TO DIE.

...THAT'S WHY I CAME TO SEE YOU.
THAT'S WHY...
...I'M HONESTLY ASKIN' YOU FOR HELP HERE.
...THESE PAST TWO WEEKS...
I'VE TRULY ENJOYED THEM...
I FELT LIKE I WASN'T ALONE.
WITH YOU, I COULD FIND A WAY TO SURVIVE, EVEN IN THE TOTAL DARKNESS.
I THOUGHT I COULD DIE HAPPY.

...SO YOU SAY.
スッ (SUKU) (STAND)
I GET IT.
BECAUSE I'M ALSO ...
コツ (KO) (CONK)
...THE SAME.
...BUT I CAN'T CHOOSE THAT EASILY...
...TO BE WITH YOU HERE-AFTER, YOU SEE?
...RIGHT?

...
YEAH.
YOU'RE THAT KIND OF GUY.
I KILLED KANON HILBERT.
KIYOTAKA PLANNED IT THAT WAY.
EVEN IF YOU CAN'T SAVE THE BLADE CHILDREN ...
...IF YOU KILLED ME AND KIYOTAKA TO AVENGE KANON, AT LEAST IT'D BE SOME CONSOLATION TO EVERYONE.
THAT'D BE SERVING JUSTICE.
IT'D SET ME FREE FROM THE DARKNESS.
AND I'M FINE WITH THAT.
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME EVERY-THING ...
...BEFORE YOU KILLED HIM?
WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK FOR MY HELP FROM THE START...?

IF YOU'D DONE THAT, HE'D STILL—
...I COULDN'T FULLY TRUST YOU.
IF I'D ASKED FOR HELP JUST LIKE THAT...
...SOMEWHERE IN MY HEART ...
...YOU MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN PLAIN AND SIMPLE TO STAY WITH ME.
BUT THAT WOULD'VE ONLY FIXED THINGS TEMPORARILY.
I THOUGHT YOU'D ONLY BE THINKING OF A WAY TO SAVE THE CHILDREN...
...AND WOULD ONE DAY LEAVE ME ALONE AGAIN.
I KNOW NOW.
YOU'RE NOT THE KIND OF PERSON WHO'D ABANDON SOMEONE SO EASILY.
BUT I CREATED A SITUATION SO THAT...
...AFTER YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE, YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO GO BACK.

IF I KILLED KANON HILBERT, WHO WANTED TO DIE...
...I FIGURED I WOULDN'T FEEL TOO GUILTY.
I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO KILL ANYBODY IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO...!
AYUMU ...
...MAKE A CHOICE.

...YOU HAVE TO KILL KIYOTAKA.
YOU CAN'T FORGIVE KIYOTAKA FOR MAKIN' YOU RIDE THIS WHEEL OF FATE...
...AND THEN DECIDIN' HOW YOU'LL DIE.
YOU CAN'T LIVE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE WITHOUT KILLIN' HIM.
...YEAH.
YOU CAN ONLY CHOOSE ONE OR THE OTHER NOW.
...END THINGS BY STICKIN' TO YOUR GUNS AND BRINGIN' SALVATION TO THE BLADE CHILDREN.
EITHER END THIS WITH ME, OR...

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO ME AFTER THIS...
...MY BROTHER'S THE ONLY ONE I CAN'T FORGIVE.
HE CONTRIVED THIS WHOLE THING.
HE MANIPU-LATED IT ALL.
HE STOLE EVERYTHING.
SO LONG AS MY BROTHER LIVES...
...MY HEART WILL NEVER FEEL AT REST.
IN THE END...
...I WILL KILL MY BROTHER.

...SO, HERE AND NOW...
...MY CHOICE IS TO EITHER JOIN YOU OR KILL YOU.
UNLESS I CHOOSE, I'LL HAVE NOTHING LEFT AFTER I'VE DIRTIED MY HANDS.
I WON'T GET WHAT I WANT.
I CAN'T APOLOGIZE TO EVERY-ONE.
CAN'T PAY THEM BACK.
AND CAN'T MOURN THEM.
IF I DON'T CHOOSE ONE...
...I'LL LOSE IT ALL.
EVEN IF I DON'T WANT TO CHOOSE...
...I HAVE TO.

IT'S AN ABSURD CHOICE.
PASHI (PSSHT)
THOUGH OURS IS A LITTLE MORE OUTRAGEOUS THAN THE USUAL.
...EVERYBODY HAS TO MAKE CHOICES THAT THEY DON'T LIKE SOMETIMES.
...
YEAH.
...YOU SAID IT.
YOU DECIDE.
FOR WHAT PURPOSE WILL YOU DIRTY THOSE HANDS OF YOURS?

SURE, HE MIGHT HIT SOMEBODY, BUT THEN HE'D ONLY TELL THEM, "YOU'RE MAKING A MISTAKE!" AND END IT THERE!!
TELL ME I'M WRONG!!
EVEN IF HIS FATE IS ABSOLUTE ...
...YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT NARUMI-SAN KILLING ANYBODY!
YOU'RE WRONG!!
BAN SLAM
BUT WHAT'S LEFT AFTER HE STOPS?
WHEN SOMEONE'S LOST HIS OWN SALVATION, AND JUSTICE TURNS ON HIM...
...WHAT CAN HE ASK FOR?
NO MATTER HOW LONG HE HESITATES ...
...AYUMU NARUMI CAN ONLY CHOOSE WHAT KANON DID—HOW HE'LL DIE.

PI
PI
PI (BEEP)
PI
PI
KANON ACCEPTED THAT, AND THAT'S WHY...
...HE CHOSE DEATH.

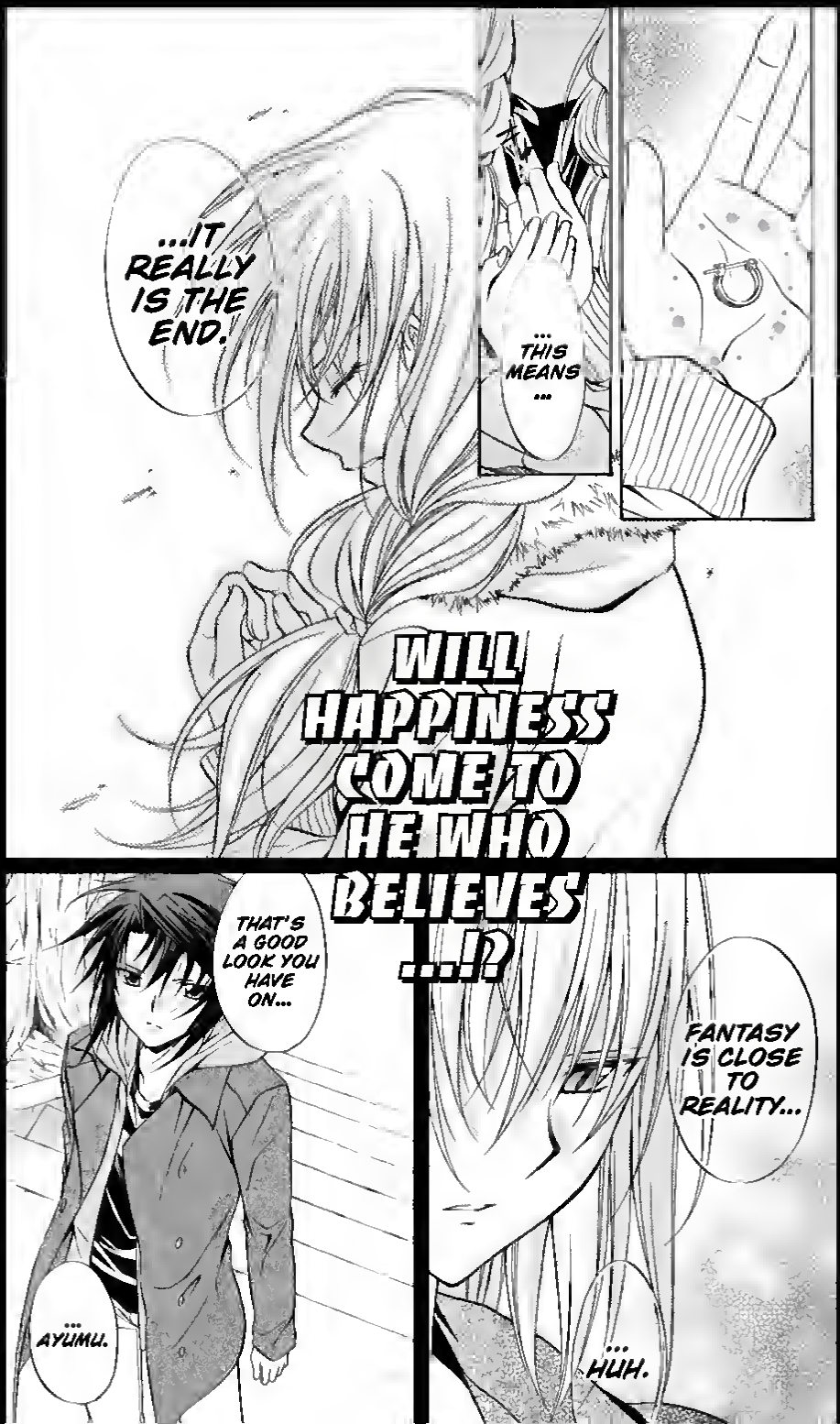
Spiral
THE BONDS OF REASONING

OUR TALE REACHES ITS CLIMAX!!!
GET OUT YOUR GUN TOO.
AYUMU AND HIZUMI PUT THEIR EXISTENCES AND LOGIC ON THE LINE AS THEY FIGHT EACH OTHER, WITH THE LOSER DOOMED TO FOLLOW THE VICTOR'S LOGIC...!!

...OR YOU WANT TO BE KILLED BY ME.
EITHER YOU WANT TO BE WITH ME...
DESPAIR AND LONELINESS...WHERE BOTH OF THEIR FATES ARE HEADED...
I'M NOT GOING TO KILL ANYONE.
I'M GOING TO CREATE HOPE, NOT DESPAIR.
WHAT I ASK FOR MOST IS A FUTURE WITH YOU!
HERE I COME!
AYUMU ...!!
...RESTS IN THE OTHER'S REVOLVER...

BUT ...
...SOMETIMES IT'S THE SMALLEST THING THAT GIVES SUPPORT TO YOUR HEART
THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAVE YOU...
SIGH...
...IS YOU YOURSELF.
WHAT IS THE LOGIC AYUMU EXPRESSES' AND THE HOPE THAT UPHOLDS IT!?
IF I GIVE UP HERE AND NOW...
...I'LL LOSE EVERYTHING I EVER HAD WITH THOSE WHO BELIEVED IN ME.

IT'S LIKE THE TOWER OF BABEL, ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE.
HOLD ON TO THIS FOR ME.
PROMISE ME.
WHEN I WIN AGAINST MY BROTHER AND COME BACK...
...YOU'LL RETURN IT TO ME.


...IT REALLY IS THE END.
...THIS MEANS...
WILL HAPPINESS COME TO HE WHO BELIEVES...!?
FANTASY IS CLOSE TO REALITY...
...HUH.
THAT'S A GOOD LOOK YOU HAVE ON...
...AYUMU.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN VOLUME 15 OF "SPIRAL: THE BONDS OF REASONING"!!

To be continued. Please wait !

HOLD IT, NARUMI-SAN! YOU DIDN'T EVEN OFFER ME THOSE WHEN I CAME OVER!!
PUN
PUN (FUME)
*SEE VOLUME TWELVE.
Spiral Work Diary
-IN THIS EDITION, WE COVER ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS AND AMIDA.-
.....
WILL THESE SLIPPERS DO?
IN THE NARUMI HOUSEHOLD.
THAT WAS A BUILDING THAT MADE MY ASSISTANTS WEEP.
THE TOWER.
WHAT DO WE DO?
WHAT DO WE DO?
AND THE INKING IS USUALLY DONE BY WHATEVER OTHER MEMBERS ARE ON HAND FOR THE JOB.
IN MY STUDIO, TYPICALLY ONE ASSISTANT DOES THE DRAFTS FOR BACKGROUNDS.
I'M SO WIPED OUT FROM THIS TOWER.
SORRY BUT THANKS.
GYAAA!
ANYTHING BUT THAT!!
THANKS FOR INKING IT FOR ME.
LET'S MAKE THE TOWER LOOK LIKE THAT.
LET'S DO IT!
ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS AND AMIDA!!
BUT OBVIOUSLY THE INKING PROCESS TAKES A LOT OF TIME (AND IS A DOWNRIGHT PAIN IN THE ASS), SO WHEN BACKGROUNDS HAVE TO BE DONE, A RULE HAS BEEN ADOPTED. AND THAT IS...

*AMIDAKUJI IS A METHOD FOR DRAWING LOTS. A NUMBER OF VERTICAL LINES ARE DRAWN, ONE FOR EACH PLAYER OR OPTION, AND THESE LINES ARE JOINED BY SEVERAL HORIZONTAL "RUNGS" AT VARYING LEVELS. EACH PLAYER PICKS A VERTICAL LINE AND TRACES A PATH DOWNWARD, TAKING A RUNG WHEN THEY REACH IT, UNTIL THEY REACH THE BOTTOM AND GET WHATEVER PRIZE OR PUNISHMENT IS AT THE END OF THE PATH THEY CHOSE
...IT'S SHOWN ME THAT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE WEAKER AT ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS AND AMIDA THAN OTHERS...
LOST AGAIN...
G... GOOD LUCK...!
THE VICTORIES FROM THE ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS PORTION DON'T REALLY MEAN MUCH, BUT...
IT GOES PRETTY MUCH LIKE THIS: AN AMIDA IS DRAWN, AND THEN THE ORDER OF PLAYERS IS DECIDED BY ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS.
IT FEELS LIKE AN AWFULLY ROUNDABOUT WAY TO DO THINGS, BUT IT'S FUN TOO, SO I RECOMMEND ALL OF YOU OUT THERE GIVE IT A GO TOO.
AMIDA! LET'S DO AMIDA!
THERE'RE ALL DIFFERENT FLAVORS.
I GOT US ALL SOME JELLY!
THIS ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS FOLLOWED BY AMIDA SYSTEM IS APPLIED TO ALL SORTS OF SITUATIONS IN THE OFFICE.
ALL THOSE WHO WON'T HAVE A TURN
BY THE WAY, THE FINAL INSTALLMENT OF THIS WORK DIARY WILL BE IN THE NEXT VOLUME. AND FINALLY, YOU-KNOW-WHO MAKES AN APPEARANCE (AS PLANNED).
I FEEL SO HEAVY...
?
?
WELL, I HOPE TO SEE YOU IN THE NEXT WORK DIARY TOO.

AFTERWORD

Here we are at Volume 14, with the final act closing in upon us. This is Kyo Shirodaira.

With the next volume wrapping up our entire series, it would have been quite a feat to not have that feeling of urgency, but since there's so much information that has to be laid out for the final battle to work, I apologize for the real strife I put you all through as readers.

This volume was obviously gearing up for the grand finale, so I should mention here that there are two components for the ending of *Spiral* that I had planned way back would be revealed at the very end. One was the fact that Ayumu is Kiyiotaka's clone, as you saw in this volume.

Around chapter ten, I'd been thinking that such a component would be necessary to end the series, so I wrote the story to best reach that revelation. And since I feared my editor would reject it, I didn't tell him until it was too late to turn back.

The idea of clones has already been overused in the sci-fi genre since the last century. And I wasn't too sure about how it'd fly in a mystery story. But since it's been featured enough in the newspapers nowadays, I figured it was the perfect time for its debut. That's how quickly the times change.

There's something sort of predictable about Ayumu's being a clone. It is a very real issue we now face in our present-day society, and it is also difficult to deal with in the fictional sense. But when drawing up this plan of fate for him, there was no way I could ignore it (not that I had any other alternative plans). Hence, what I ended up with.

I'm just saying this for the record, but there is no relation between this story and my stance on the issue of cloning technology. I won't assert the idea that, because cloned bodies are very susceptible to abnormalities, they are wrong. Nor am I arguing that research should be more actively pursued in the study of cloning. With all the variables to consider, it's difficult to take a solid stance on the subject, and there are many layers of legal debate to contend with. So please don't try to pass judgment on it without some deep and serious thought.

There was a lot to consider, but in the end I was able to realize one of the two components I had planned. The other one is going to come to light in the next volume. This too I thought up way back around chapter ten with the intention of revealing it at the very end, so I kept it hidden for fear of its being rejected. And when I finally did talk about it, it was pretty heavily denounced, but in the end, it safely got passed. If you're curious as to what it is, wait for the next volume. It will decide the very showdown between Ayumu and Kiyotaka.

Well, I guess that served in some way to raise your expectations for the next volume, eh?

Our story has had the constant theme of crushing one dream after another, but believe it or not, it's not going to end on a tragic note. For all the tragedies that have befallen our hero along the way, in the end he's going to be able to say, "I'm truly happy." But what kind of happiness will Ayumu get ahold of?

Well, we've had plenty of twists and turns, but here it is! Let's finish this thing up!

I'll be praying that we meet again in the last volume, Volume 15.

城平京

KYO SHIRODAIRA

BONDED LEGEND
SPIRAL OF DESTINY
FIGHTER
KNIGHT
WITCH

FUWAAA (FLOAT)
KIYOTAKA
SORCERER
MAGIC CREATURE
ポロロ～ン
POROROON (STRUMMM)
WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE...?
BEATS ME
YOU CALLED?
PERFORMER
THIEF
SAGE
MINSTREL

FUWAAA (FLOAT)
KIYOTAKA
SORCERER
MAGIC CREATURE
ポロロ～ン♪
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YOU ?
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FIGHTER
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WITCH
BONDED LEGEND
SPIRAL OF DESTINY

SPIRAL
The Bonds of Reasoning ⑭

Kyo Shirodaira
Eita Mizuno

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